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THE RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSIES OF SCOTLAND

RELIGION IN LITERATURE AND LIFE

THE RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSIES OF SCOTLAND

BY THE

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RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSIES OF SCOTLAND

INTRODUCTORY

THEOLOGICAL controversy in Scotland, since the Reformation, dates only from the eighteenth century. Prior to that time there had been controversy, fierce and incessant controversy, but it had been ecclesiastical rather than theological, and had to do with the question of Church Government, whether by prelates or presbyters, and not with the fundamentals of the faith or any of the doctrines of Christianity. Speculation on these high themes, even a free expression of opinion regarding them, was hardly known before the date mentioned, and could not be said to have been much encouraged in a land where unbelief was counted a crime, and blasphemy was visited with the punishment of death. Besides, the times were far too stormy and sanguinary to be favourable to the culture of theological studies. The despotism of the Stuarts had first to cease, a period of tranquillity to

interpose, and a halt to be called to the hostilities of civil and ecclesiastical strife. We have to remember, also, the stimulus given to every form of energy by the union of the two kingdoms. Every kind of enterprise—social, commercial, intellectual—went forward at a bound. Both countries, but especially Scotland, reaped the benefit of friendly intercourse and interchange of sentiment. And it is a significant fact that the first theological controversies in Scotland entered from across the border, and had their cradle on English soil.

But although a late comer, theological activity in Scotland has more than compensated for this by the vigour and resourcefulness of its career. The ordinary Church historian has, indeed, hardly ever taken notice of this fact. He has seldom condescended to note the progress of religious opinions among us. He has never given a chapter to the history of heresy in Scotland. All his attention has been applied to the Church's contendings and sufferings in the defence of her rights, to the story of her struggles and collisions with rulers and civil magistrates, to the battle against patronage and the intrusion of presentees, while the work done in the theological cloister and the contributions of the Church towards the preservation and enrichment of her treasures of wisdom and knowledge —a Church's true riches—have been, as a rule, passed by as of little consequence.

Yet a thrilling story can be told under this heading, since to Scotland has fallen the honour of leading the way among English-speaking nations in the dispersion of religious ideas and the discussion of theological pro-

blems. She has had a democratic Church, and that, along with a rigid adherence to the Confession of Faith, has carried her into this proud position. As she has been accustomed to bring all her affairs before a popular tribunal of clerics and laymen, every apostle of progress that has appeared in her midst has had to fight his way through a phalanx of resistance and prejudice, with the result that he has always had a large and influential constituency to address; and the more his views have been challenged, the more widely they have spread.

For two centuries, then, Scotland has been a home and battlefield of theology; and while, during that long period, no theologian of the first rank has appeared, none of the calibre of Aquinas or St. Augustine, there has never been lacking men remarkable for their spiritual genius, interpreters of the mind of God, defenders and expounders of the Word, and masters in the understanding and unfolding of the method of Divine revelation.

CHAPTER I

PROFESSOR SIMSON'S "AFFAIR"

AUTHORITIES

An Enquiry into Mr. Simson's Sentiments. By Principal Hadow. Edin. 1730.

The proper, true, and supreme Deity of our Lord. By a Minister of the Church of Scotland. Edin. 1730.

Willison's *Fair and Impartial Testimony.* Edin. 1797.

M'Laren's *New Scheme of Doctrine.* Edin. 1717.

Wodrow's *Correspondence,* iii. (Maitland Club) 1843.

Wodrow's *Analecta,* iii., iv. (Maitland Club) 1843.

Scotland and Scotsmen in the 18th Century. By Ramsay of Ochtertyre. Edin. 1888.

Autobiography of Carlyle of Inveresk. Edin. 1860.

Memoirs of Thomas Boston (Morrison's edition). Edin. 1899.

The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity. By Dr. Samuel Clarke. Lond. 1712.

A System of Moral Philosophy. By Francis Hutcheson. Glasg. 1755.

Original Notices of Lady Grange. By Macleay. Edin. 1881.

JOHN SIMSON, Professor of Divinity at Glasgow, was the first notable heretic within the Scottish Church, the first to strike a blow that roused her from the slumber in which she had long lain. There were two stages in his career. The one dated from 1714 to 1717, the period of his Arminian heresies; the other, from 1726 to 1729, during which he kept the country in ferment with his views on the subject of the Deity of Christ. Whether Simson was Arminian out

and out may now be doubted, but there is no question that his views brought him into violent collision with the high and dry Calvinism of the time, and that was sufficient to constitute him an offender in the opinion of all competent judges. His fault seems to have been, that he regarded Christianity in a light that borrowed little from dogma and mystery, and owed much to reason and common sense. In full accord with the new-fangled notions of morals then beginning to be taught, he declared that happiness here and hereafter was the chief aim and design of the gospel, the glory of God being a secondary and subordinate matter. The same benevolent philosophy inclined him to take a hopeful view of the salvation of the heathen. If they but honestly followed the light they had, and sincerely desired salvation, the heathen could be saved even without the knowledge of Christ.

Those were regarded at the time as monstrous propositions, as were also these, that more of mankind would be saved than lost, and that all baptized infants dying in infancy went immediately to glory. Simson was arraigned before the Courts of the Church, and made to answer for his objectionable views. His judges, to do them justice, went to work in a remarkably rational manner. In proceeding to an examination of his *errors*, they distinguished between three different classes of proposition: those clearly opposed to Scripture and the Creed; those supported by tradition, although not determined by Scripture or Creed; and those not fixed or formulated at all by Scripture, Creed, or Tradition. This was a fair and intelligent method of inquiry.

The leading spirit in the prosecution of Simson was Webster of Edinburgh, "a man exceedingly popular on account of his zeal for orthodoxy and the fervour of his sermons and prayers . . . but withal somewhat coarse and unpolished in his language in the pulpit and out of it."[1] Another formidable antagonist was John M'Laren, whose obituary in an old copy of the *Caledonian Mercury* (July 12, 1734), is in these words: "Died here the Rev. John M'Laren, one of the ministers of the city, esteemed a well-meaning man and *void of hypocrisy*." M'Laren published in 1717 *The new scheme of Doctrine contained in the answers of Mr. John Simson to Mr. Webster's libel*, and in a preface to the reader he makes the humble acknowledgment: "I freely own that the Professor is a man of learning and parts above anything I can pretend to (for they commonly say *virtus in hoste laudanda est*), as also that he seems to be of an agreeable conversation. But I am sorry he should have employed his parts to teach and defend such dangerous errors as tend to worm out the vitals of our received doctrine. It brings to my mind what I have read of an honest and plain Christian who, when at some of the old Councils a man of acuteness and parts was defending error, said to him, *Diabolus cupit se ornare*, that is, 'Satan covets to dress or set off himself or his ill cause with your learning.'"

M'Laren was a fair and manly controversialist, without much trace of arrogance; and his book furnishes us with a worthy and grave presentation of the matters in dispute. Speaking of the necessity for an objective revelation, he says, "Reconcileableness belonging to

[1] Ramsay, *Scotland and Scotsmen*, i. 236.

a supernatural or Gospel order of things must needs be a pure object of faith, and our faith of it must needs be some way bottomed upon the means that discover reconcileableness. And therefore if the light of Nature, works of Creation and Providence, reveal God to be reconcileable, they are a partial foundation of faith, and the means of begetting it. But I ever thought that faith had been only bottomed upon the revealed Word, and that it was only by the Word faith was wrought, as is plain from the Scripture."[1]

Again, in regard to Simson's theories of benevolence, M'Laren is most acute: "As to what he says, that it is more agreeable to the *gracious nature of God* that all baptized infants dying in infancy should be saved, it's a fallacious reason. For, 1st. Do not Arminians found universal redemption on this argument? 2nd. Will not this argument prove that there must be more adult elect than reprobate, for this seems more *agreeable to the gracious nature of God?* 3rd. Will it not prove that poor heathens living according to the light they have are saved though they never heard of a Redeemer? Yea, 4thly. Will it not prove it probable that all the reprobate after some time suffering will either be delivered or annihilated, for both these seem *more agreeable to God's gracious nature?* As for the tenor of the Covenant, it suits not with it at all unless he make the covenant of grace universal as extending to all mankind, which we find he does afterwards."

An unpolished polemic M'Laren may have been, he may even in the pulpit have resorted to the tricks of the buffoon,—stories pointing that way are still preserved,

[1] P. 13.

—he was at all events a powerful champion of the orthodox position, and, as the sentences just quoted show, a reasoner who saw clearly, and whose sight reached far into the drift and tendency of views.

The Church was in no mood to deal harshly with her erring Professor. He was discharged with a caution against wandering again into divergent courses, or employing expressions not found in Scripture that tended to attribute more than was meet to man's natural reason and the power of corrupt human nature. The decision dissatisfied some, who grumbled at the Church's leniency, and attributed it to the large number of relatives, acquaintances, and old pupils who were among Simson's judges. One of the dissatisfied was Willison of Dundee, who tells us that he regarded it as a just rebuke upon the Church for her mildness with Simson, that he persisted in his heretical courses, despised the discipline that was exercised upon him, and was in consequence brought before the Church Courts a few years afterwards charged with still graver errors.[1]

Delinquents brought before the ecclesiastical tribunal to answer for their opinions have usually been young men, unversed in the ways of the world and aglow with the ardour of inexperience. Simson, however, was an exception to the rule, having attained the mature age of sixty when the charge of "still graver errors" was preferred against him. Perhaps it was to his credit that at a time of life when the mind grows stationary, Simson was keeping himself abreast of learning, and bringing his mind under the influence of the most eminent philosophic thinker of his time.

[1] Willison's *Testimony*, p. 402.

Dr. Samuel Clarke had in 1712 published his famous work on the Trinity, wherein he propounded views regarding the Deity of Christ that aroused a long-continued storm of controversy. A clergyman of the Church of England and a chaplain of Queen Anne, he thereby brought himself into collision with the House of Convocation. That venerable body, however, was content with silencing Clarke, not answering him or attempting to do so. Had not Arianism been answered fourteen hundred years before at the famous Council of Nicæa? Why repeat the task? According to Arius, Christ was not begotten, but made. So far as God was concerned, he drew no distinction between creation and generation. Christ had come out of the non-existent state, not indeed in time, but before it; yet not through any inherent necessity of the Divine Nature, but by an act of the Father's choice. There was a moment when He began to be. He might never have been, had the Father willed otherwise. He cannot therefore be God as the Father is God. He is certainly the first of created beings, immeasurably the first of them, and indeed by Him all other creatures have their being. Therefore is He named "Logos," "the Son," "the Only-begotten." He deserves these titles because of the glory to which He has risen. We may even without impropriety call Him *God*, although, strictly speaking, He is only a demi-god.

Such was Arianism which Athanasius answered in the fourth century, under the eye of the great Constantine, and in the interests of a Christian view of Redemption. According to Athanasius, if Christ were not truly God, *very God of very God*, He was only a creature after

all, and therefore not able to act as Mediator betwixt God and man. Redemption means union with God, through union with the Son of God. No mere creature, by taking us into fellowship with himself, can ever bring us into fellowship with God. If Christ be only one Son among many, then for man there can be no salvation. "Athanasius," says Harnack, "exposed the inner difficulties and contradictions, and in almost every case we may allow that he has right on his side. A Son who is no Son, a Logos who is no Logos, a monotheism which nevertheless does not exclude polytheism, two or three *ousias* which are to be revered while yet only one of them is really distinct from the creatures, an indefinable being who first becomes God by becoming man, and who is yet neither God nor man, and so on. In every single point we have apparent clearness, while all is hollow and formal, a boyish enthusiasm for playing with husks and shells, and a childish self-satisfaction in the working out of empty syllogisms."[1]

Clarke attempted to revive these views of the Deity of Christ, but not in the full Arian form. According to his view, the Personality of God was not threefold, but one. The Son and the Spirit are indeed Divine persons, but not Divine in the same sense as the Father, inasmuch as He derives His being from none, while They derive Theirs from Him; and They do this not in virtue of an inherent necessity of His nature, but from an act of free choice on His part. As They have come into existence before time, They are not to be looked upon as belonging to creaturely

[1] *History of Dogma*, iv. 42.

rank; but, on the other hand, neither in any strict sense are They to be regarded as the coequals of God, as They have not been, like Him, eternally begotten.

Such was Clarke's modified Arianism. Orthodoxy opposed it in the person of Dr. Waterland and other champions of Creeds and Councils; but the seed spread, and some seeds were carried far north to the Divinity class-rooms of covenanting Scotland. Simson was reported to be repeating Clarke's views to his students, denying the independence and necessary existence of the Son and the numerical oneness of the Trinity. So it was rumoured. His ecclesiastical superiors at once took him to task; and in order to make a conviction against him the more sure, not only charged him with teaching deadly heresy, for which he was liable to severe ecclesiastical punishment, but with disobeying the former orders of the Court against employing terms and hypotheses out of harmony with the form of sound words.

The weapon held at the Professor's head was thus double-barrelled. The process instituted against him dragged itself on for four weary years, and kept the Church in a caldron of excitement. Nothing else was discussed in social circles but Professor Simson's "affair." "These three years now, the Church's time hath been taken up with this affair of Mr. Simson. Nothing else almost hath been done of any weight. We can get no advances made in forming regulations, acts, and constitutions, the proper work of an Assembly."[1] Such is Wodrow's complaint. The minister of Eastwood and other Assembly worthies

[1] *Analecta*, iv. 54.

held many a protracted conclave over the case in the parlour of the Eagle Inn, a favourite ecclesiastical resort of the day. At last, with a grateful sense of relief, he was able to write home: "Now we are within some view of land, if some wave toss us not back."

Often had the Church of Scotland faced worse difficulties; but then the evil confronted her from without, from professed enemies and persecutors. Now her troubles were from within, from a quarter from whence she had been wont to expect not an assault on, but a defence of the faith. Public feeling was more excited than at any previous time within memory. The Simson "affair," as it was called, engrossed all minds and influenced every question. The Moderator of Assembly was chosen because of his views on the case; and the sermons preached by him before the Assembly discussed nothing else. Even school children took sides according to their humour, and the hawkers on the streets bawled out the names of Church leaders as they plied their wares. "I hear a farce is writt on the Ministers of the toun and what has hapned of late about the Professor." So Wodrow writes, shocked that anyone should "mock and ridicul Gospell Ministers." The Assembly debates lasted at times eight days on end. Pious Boston tells us how they were nearly being the death of him. "I came home from Edinburgh on Wednesday, 21st May, and found my family, by the mercy of God, no worse than when I left them. I found a cough and a pain in my back, which had fallen to me in the spring, both of them worse; and I was under

great indisposition for about ten days after. By that pain in my back it was with great difficulty that I could change my sitting posture into an erect one. It *had been carried to that height by means of the extreme long seats we had got at the Assembly in Professor Simson's affair.*"[1] Simson's students, past and present, were expected to be important actors in the drama, as their note-books and memories contained all that was of the nature of proof against the Professor. But the young men were provokingly reticent, which was not greatly to be wondered at, considering the fact that College lectures were then given in Latin, and besides this, as the fatherly Wodrow adds, "most of them were young raw lads, who I believe did not really understand what Mr. Simson had taught."

It was easily proved against him that he had gone astray in his exposition of that difficult dogma, the Subordination of the Son, and the offence was considered far from trifling on the part of one in his position. But before the final sentence was passed upon him, the culprit publicly retracted all his errors, and expressed his grief for whatever he had said or done that had offended. If by this deathbed repentance he expected to be restored to his place in the Church, he greatly mistook the temper of the men he had now to deal with. They were not in the genial humour they were in at the previous trial. They likened him to Charles I., who made a good many concessions, but made them too late. In an ecclesiastical sense his day of grace was past. Recantations notwithstanding, he

[1] *Analecta*, iii. 183.

was removed from his professorial dignity, and declared unfit to be entrusted with the preparation of candidates for the ministry. The sentence of deposition, however, was not passed, although many thought it should have been. But, as Willison shrewdly observed, it was "safer for the truth to bind up his pen by a suspension and to keep him under it, than by a deposition to provoke a man of his learning to make open attacks upon the most important truths of our holy religion."

The story of Simson's trial would be dull reading, were it not for the interesting figures that move upon the stage. The heads of the four Universities were prominent in the case, — Hadow, Principal of St. Andrews; Hamilton, Principal of Edinburgh; Campbell, of Glasgow; and Chalmers, of Aberdeen. The first-named, a consistent zealot for orthodoxy, was against Simson; the others took his part. John M'Laurin of Glasgow, still remembered for his sermon, "Glorying in the Cross of Christ,"—a sermon long spoken of as the finest product of the Scottish pulpit,—took the orthodox side, and as the popular preacher of the day won the public ear.

Another champion of the faith was Lord Grange, who played many parts in his day. One of the straitest of the sect of the Pharisees, and fearing innovations more than sin,—he wanted to suppress circulating libraries as immoral institutions,—he was at the same time a Jacobite intriguer, who banished his wife to St. Kilda so as to prevent her divulging secrets about himself, meanwhile pretending to his friends that the lady had died, and actually going through the farce of a mock funeral. Nor was this all. By turns devotee and

debauchee, he is said by those who knew him to have spent his time in alternate scenes of prayer and wantonness. Among Simson's most active prosecutors was this bundle of inconsistencies. Before the case opened he addressed Wodrow in these unctuous phrases, "I heartily wish it may be a misreport; and if not, surely every one who loves our blessed Lord Jesus has cause to mourn for it. . . ." "Since that time (when he first heard about Simson's teaching) I have been particularly afraid of a stroke to this Church from that great error."[1] The same bland Pecksniff described Simson as a man who practised "the art of teaching heresy orthodoxly." As a lawyer he helped to frame the libel, and being much in the company of the clergy had abundant opportunity of practising *his* arts on the guileless men. The unsuspicious Wodrow tells how, "one day when they were waiting for Mr. Simson, and had sent for him to a Sub-Commity in my Lord's chamber, to fill the feild (*i.e.* occupy the interval), my Lord proposed a question for conversation, wherein the Spirit's proper wórk upon the soul did lye: or whither thir was anything further necessary to be done by the Spirit for spirituall actions but the irradiations of spirituall light on the mind, and the strengthening of the mind to receive it."[2]

At the opposite pole to this compound of mind and mire stood the spiritually-minded Boston, another of Simson's opponents. Boston has long lain under the reproach of being a sour bigot; but probably this is

[1] Wodrow's *Correspondence*, iii. 235.
[2] *Analecta*, iii. 207.

doing him great injustice. Readers of his *Memoirs* will remember one reference to Simson which does him much credit. He had prepared an essay on Hebrew accentuation, and looking about for a person of scholarly attainments to whom to submit it before publication, he decided that none was more to his liking for this purpose than the heretical Professor. This was in 1724, before the breaking out of Simson's Arianism, but after he had been dealt with for his Arminian errors.[1] Boston travelled to the Assembly from a bed of illness, under a sense of duty, in "Mr. Simson's weighty affair." He joined in the cabal that gathered in the evenings at the Spread Eagle, among the others being Colonel Erskine ("the Black Colonel"), ancestor of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen. At this much-frequented tavern on one of these occasions, Boston, while waiting for an ecclesiastic, occupied himself penning his famous dissent. Unable to agree to a mere suspension, he rose in the Assembly and read his dissent, which he prefaced in these Luther-like terms: "I dissent in my own name and in name of all that shall adhere to me, and for myself alone, if nobody shall adhere." "Will you tear out the bowels of your mother?" asked the Moderator. "Whereunto," adds Boston, "I being sensibly touched, replied, 'That if I had the conviction of that's being the tendency thereof, I would rather take it (the paper I read) and tear it in a thousand pieces.'"[2] Boston's manly stand made a great impression at the time, and he ever regarded it one of the greatest honours put on him by Providence. He lost nothing by his inde-

[1] *Memoirs*, p. 378. [2] *Ibid.* p. 416.

pendent outspokenness, not even in a worldly sense. "Though it was an invidious appearance in which I was left alone; yet being made out of conscience towards God, it was so ordered by Providence that it visibly tended to my reputation both with the one party and the other; whereof several expressions were made to me. . . . This invidious appearance, which seemed to have an ill aspect on the affair of the essay on the accentuation, had a quite contrary effect; so that before I came from Edinburgh, the printing of it there, and publishing proposals for that effect, were moved to me by Mr. James Davidson, bookseller, and Robert Fleming, printer."[1]

Simson, although he had considerable scholarship and learning, was not a man of lofty character. His judges were probably his intellectual inferiors, as those of Arius, according to the best authorities, seem to have been his; and if Wodrow is to be trusted, Simson had the vulgarity to say so. His words were, that "there were not ten ministers in Scotland that understood anything of the debates on the Trinity"; which made Wodrow retort, "If thir things be true, as I am pretty well informed of them from the second-hand, he must either be perfectly craized in his brain, or intollerably proud and foolish."[2] In one quality his judges were at least his equals, in hard-headed shrewdness. This comes out in their treatment of his retractions. No amount of these had the slightest weight with them; they either disbelieved or despised them all. As Wodrow says to one of his correspondents:[3] "I

[1] *Memoirs*, p. 419.
[2] *Analecta*, iii. 243.
[3] *Correspondence*, iii. 406.

should soon know what I had to do if a young student had the charge of my children and had taught them to lie, to equivocate, to commit wickedness, and when he had stiffly denied all, questioned my power to inquire into his manner of teaching, refused to answer my inquiries touching his teaching my boys till I had proven all against him, and was just going to give my opinion upon the whole, and retracted all, and professed sorrow for what was past, and his resolutions to guard against these things in time to come. I'll assure you I would not trust my children to him, if another were to be had in the world; and even though I could not have another, I would let them read alone rather than continue under such a person."

Another virtuous quality belonged to Simson's judges. They realised to the full the seriousness of his doctrines and teaching, and it surprised them not a little to find that tenets which they could call by no other name than *gross errors and heresies contrary to the Divine Word*, the Professor somewhat callously designated *hypotheses*. To them that seemed an altogether inadequate description of doctrines which, like those of Arius, strike at the life of Theism itself. Arianism was relentlessly condemned by the Council of Nicæa, because by reducing the Second Person of the Trinity to the level of a demi-god, as we have seen it did, it played into the hands of heathen pantheism and polytheism. The questions at issue between Arius and Athanasius were no mere war of words or metaphysical wrangle, as may be seen by the fate that befell Christianity in those places where it entered in Arian form. It entered among the Goths

in that imperfect form, and, as a recent writer tells us, "they accepted Christ as a hero-God, like those to which they were accustomed. Provided thus with a platform which lay between heathenism and Christianity, they came to a premature halt." He adds, "The Christianity of the later Goths in Spain appears to have admitted of a certain impartial veneration for the Christian God and heathen idols. 'We do not, says Agila, the envoy from the Arian Leovigild to Chilperic at Tours,—'we do not reckon it a crime to worship this and that; for we say in our common speech, It is no harm if a man passing between heathen altars and a church of God makes his reverence in both directions.'"[1]

That the enemies of Simson's teaching did not overestimate the seriousness of his errors, receives corroboration from another quarter, as modern as that just cited is ancient. Froude tells us how contemptuously Carlyle in his earlier years treated the Athanasian Controversy, as though it were a mere quarrel over a diphthong, whether Christ were *homoousios* or *homoiousios* of the Father. "He now told me," said Froude, "that he perceived Christianity to have been at stake. If the Arians had won, it would have dwindled away to a legend."[2] With this opinion a still more modern critic already quoted agrees. Harnack holds that Christianity would in all probability have been completely ruined had the Arian doctrines won the day.

[1] Gore's *Incarnation*, p. 91.
[2] *Life in London*, ii. 462.

CHAPTER II

THE MARROW MEN

AUTHORITIES

The Marrow of Modern Divinity. C. G. M'Crie's edition. Glasg. 1902.

Boston's *Memoirs.* Edin. 1899.

Memoirs of Fraser of Brea. Edin. 1738.

The Antinomianism of the Marrow, Detected. By Principal Hadow. Edin. 1721.

Acts of the General Assembly, 1638–1842. Edited by the Church Law Society.

The Edinburgh Christian Instructor, for 1831–32. Articles by T. M'Crie.

The Controversie concerning the Marrow. Edin. 1721.

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Witherspoon's *Ecclesiastical Characteristics.* Edin. 1815.

Walker's *Theology and Theologians of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.* Edin. 1872.

The Erskines. By MacEwan. ("Famous Scots" Series.)

WHEN it happens, in the course of religious thought, that certain truths receive undue emphasis, with the result that others of equal importance are neglected, it inevitably follows that the tables are turned, and these others, pushing aside their rivals, themselves become ascendant and even dominant. Such a swing of the pendulum is to be met with, as we pass from the theological atmosphere of the seventeenth century into the early part of the eighteenth. In the former period the thought of

God as an almost implacable sovereign seems to be the ruling idea in religion. An imperial autocrat who does whatsoever He pleaseth, His creatures are not regarded as entitled to pity and consideration at His hands. They have no claim on His love, no right to His mercy. He may favour some by granting them eternal life, and secure it to them by the seal of a covenant bond; but by the same prerogative He passes by others, leaving them to perish in their sins, without working deliverance in their behalf. We wonder at human nature being able to suffer such harsh divinity; and how men, the reverse of cruel themselves, could defend so fatalistic a form of faith. But probably acquiescence in it was easier than we imagine in a time of bloody tyranny and strife. Churchmen who had the fickle Stuart dynasty to endure, and the tortures of the boot, the scaffold, and a life of exile to face, probably drew to a fierce theology more naturally than to a mild one, and understood a martial better than a paternal administration of divine law. But with the dawn of better times and the rise of more settled government, came the desire for a more humane creed and the relaxation of dogmatic severity; and as peace and the arts of peace came more and more within men's reach, a brighter and more benevolent type of theology began to supplant the old.

So far as Scotland was concerned, the bridge that afforded them transit from the old order to the new was a book brought from Puritan England, where its author had spent a quiet life as far back as 1645. By the time it became known in Scotland, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* had been published nearly fourscore

years, and had gone through many editions. On its first appearance in England it came with the *imprimatur* of Joseph Caryl upon it, one of the Westminster Divines, and a noted preacher in his day; according to Neal, "a man of great learning, piety, and modesty," and one of Cromwell's *triers*. This is what he said in its favour: "I have perused this ensuing dialogue, and find it tending to peace and holiness: the author endeavouring to reconcile and heal those unhappy differences which have lately broken out afresh amongst us, about the points therein handled and cleared; for which cause I allow it to be printed, and recommend it to the reader as a discourse stored with many necessary and seasonable truths confirmed by scripture and avowed by many approved writers, all composed in a familiar, plain, and moderate style, without bitterness against or uncomely reflections upon others; which flies have lately corrupted many boxes of (otherwise precious) ointment."

The title of the book sufficiently describes its scope and character, provided we remember what was "modern Divinity" in the days of the Commonwealth, namely, the religion and doctrine of the Reformation. The book professes to give the pith and marrow of that doctrine, and consists largely of extracts from the Reformers' writings. Indeed, many of the sentences condemned by Principal Hadow and his friends turned out to be the words of Luther and English Church prelates conspicuous for their learning and piety. The book is in Dialogue form, and is divided into two parts. In the first, which deals with the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, the dialogue is conducted by Evan-

gelista, a Minister of the Gospel; Nomista, a Legalist; Antinomista, an Antinomian; and Neophytus, a young Christian. The second part, "touching the most plain, pithy, and spiritual exposition of the Ten Commandments," is carried on by Evangelista and Neophytus together with Nomologista, a prattler about the Law.

The writer, who gives his own views through Evangelista, was said to be an Oxford graduate of good social position but no ecclesiastical standing, who lived the life of a recluse among his books, and had won a reputation for Patristic lore and skill in Hebrew and New Testament Greek. Those who disliked the book and its teaching, and desired to suppress it, attempted to raise a feeling of prejudice against it by representing the author as a tool in the hands of the Independents against Presbyterianism, and a person of mean origin and occupation—to wit, a barber, who, dissatisfied with the position in which Providence had placed him, aspired to that of an Independent minister. Even Principal Hadow, the chief opponent of the book, circulated this report, and added: "Such an intruder into the sacred office would not readily at that time have obtained recommendation of any true Presbyterian who had a zeal for the Covenant, and sworn Reformation of the Church of Scotland." These observations were hardly worthy of Principal Hadow. After all, if it turned out, as it might do, that Fisher were neither the eldest son of a knight nor a gentleman commoner of Brasenose, as he was reputed to have been, but only a common London barber, about whom this much only was known, that he had

composed a book and appended to it the obscure initials "E. F.," what of that? Had not honest Allan Ramsay been a barber in the High Street of Edinburgh, and was not Burns to say of him:

> "Thou paints auld nature to the nines
> In thy sweet Caledonian lines"?

We turn from these personalities as beneath the notice of serious men, and proceed to the examination of a controversy that stirred the religious life of Scotland to its depths for generations. But, first, let us hearken to an estimate of the book which led to the controversy, from Hervey, the writer of *Theron and Aspasio*, once a household name in Scotland when religious books were more scarce and perhaps more valued than they are now. It reveals the kind of welcome the Marrow theology was likely to receive from the devouter minds in the land. Hervey calls it "a book designed to guard equally against Antinomian licentiousness and legal bondage. The thoughts are just and striking; the arguments solid and convincing; the diction is familiar yet perspicuous; and the doctrine exceedingly comfortable because truly evangelical. . . . Perhaps I may venture to say that this little treatise pours as much light upon the gospel and grace of Christ and . . . affords as many important distinctions in divinity as any book of its size whatever."

The book was first published in Scotland in 1718 under the care of James Hog, minister at Carnock, who wrote a preface to it. It caused an immediate commotion in religious circles, and the following year Hog published "an explication of passages excepted against

in the *Marrow*." The attention of Hog and others like-minded with him had been at the first drawn to the book by Thomas Boston, who accidentally stumbled upon it in the house of one of his parishioners at Simprin, where he was settled before he became minister at Ettrick. Boston was therefore before Hog in his discovery of the treasure. A genuine treasure it proved to him in the course of his much-tried life. "The doctrine of the Marrow," he confessed, "was the sweet and comfortable prop of my soul." Before this, Fraser of Brea, a shining light of the Scottish Church, had left it on record that he was much helped in his religious difficulties by Luther, Calvin, and others, but more than all else "by that book called *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*."

At the time that it was first published in Scotland there were circumstances that made its appearance opportune. What was called "the Auchterarder Creed" was causing a ferment in the ecclesiastical mind. That satirical phrase referred to a statement put forward in connection with a student's examination, to the effect that "it is not sound and orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ and instating us in covenant with God." The words certainly have an Antinomian flavour about them, and by a majority of the Assembly the statement was condemned. Some there were, however, now regarded as the soundest of the sound, who refused to acquiesce in this decision. The *Marrow* had brought them a knowledge of grace and of the relations between law and grace, that bore the imprint of God Himself; it had opened up to them views of the gospel that were revolutionary,

and they soon found themselves widely sundered from the conventional orthodoxy of the time. Among them were Hamilton of Airth, Gabriel Wilson of Maxton, Thomas Boston and Hog of Carnock.

The more gracious statements of the gospel identified with the *Marrow men*, as they were called, spread rapidly through the peasant cottages of Scotland by means of sermons, pamphlets, discussions in Church Courts, and impromptu debates at village forge and loom, and at length the ecclesiastical dignities, not comprehending aright the drift of the movement, but always ready to suppress enthusiasm and popular zeal, commenced to take steps to deal with the *heresy*. The first declaration of war came from Principal Hadow, who attacked the new evangel in a sermon entitled "The record of God, and duty of faith therein required." The same year (1719) a complaint was brought up to the Assembly against the book, and resulted in the Commission being empowered to call before them "any authors or recommenders of books or pamphlets containing any doctrine not agreeable to the Confession of Faith." When the Commission met, they appointed a Committee which, according to Boston, showed great zeal, but all on one side, namely, "to preserve the doctrine from mixture of Antinomianism, which the hue and cry was now raised about." The Committee divided itself into two parts, "whereof the one sat at St. Andrews and prepared excerpts out of the challenged books and prints and sent their remarks to the other, who met at Edinburgh." Hog and others were summoned before the Committee, "all of them," Boston tells us, "noted preachers of the doctrine of free grace, and withal Non-

jurors too. Hog," he adds, "told the Committee that he knew an eminent divine, then in glory (whom I judge to have been Mr. Fraser of Brea, minister at Culross), who left it in record that the reading an old edition thereof (that is, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*) was the first notable means blessed of the Lord for giving him some clearness of impression concerning the gospel."[1] The result of the Committee's inquiries was to increase rather than allay suspicion, and a formal trial of Marrow theology commenced before the Assembly of 1720. *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* was charged with teaching five errors—(1) that Assurance of Salvation is essential to a Christian; (2) that the Atonement of Christ and the Divine Pardon are of universal extent; (3) that in order to be saved it is not necessary to live a holy life; (4) that the fear of future punishment and the hope of eternal reward are not right motives for the regulation of a believer's life and conduct; (5) that the believer is not under the Divine law as a rule of life. The Assembly found the charges proved, and passed an Act declaring the teaching of the book unsound and unscriptural, prohibiting the ministers of the Church from recommending it to their hearers or saying anything in its favour, and commanding them to warn and exhort their people in whose hand the said book is or may come, not to read or use the same. This is the Act of 1720, which we will have frequent occasion to refer to again, especially in connection with the trial of John Macleod Campbell.

Whatever we may think of the simple-mindedness of men who supposed it possible to suppress a pernicious

[1] *Memoirs*, p. 348.

book by forbidding people to read it, we are bound to admire their Christian spirit and temper, and the absence of all personal rancour from their discussions. It is creditable to the Church of Scotland that nobody was at this time deposed, no one censured, no one even dealt with. She may have been ill-advised to condemn the teaching of the Marrow men, but it is to her honour that she did not touch their persons or position with one of her fingers. On both sides at this time a moderation and self-control were observed that was truly admirable. Nor were the leaders on either side the dull, unimaginative persons one might suppose them to have been. One of them, Hamilton of Airth, has given us an account of his appearance before the Committee, from which we can see that they were very human and humane men. "The communing was begun, carried on, and ended," he says, "with a good measure of calmness and I hope of brotherly respect and affection, so as that scarce one irritating expression was uttered upon either side. Only when I was craving dispatch that I might return home, Mr. Logan said it would take a month to dispatch all the queries. I told them that if once I were gone, though an ecumenick council should call me, I would not answer: to which Principal Hadow answered, 'That might be spared when the clearing of truth lay at the stake'; or some such words: to which I replied, little did he know my circumstances (illness), and with how much difficulty I came in and staid in town; or some words to that purpose. I was much obliged to the ministers of Edinburgh, particularly the Professor and Mrs. Mitchell. I confess when they were putting some queries to me

which insinuated great suspicion of gross errors, and others that I thought grated much upon special gospel truths, my heart grew so great that I could scarce utter a word without a flood of tears, for which I craved their pardon, and told them it was my infirmity, which I could not help ; and some of themselves were so affected that they *teared* also." [1]

The next stage in the development of events was notable. Twelve of the Marrow men prepared a Representation of their position, clearing up the misunderstandings on which the Assembly's Act was founded, and begging that it be repealed. The principal Representers were Boston, Kid of Queensferry, a man of singular boldness, Ebenezer Erskine and his brother Ralph, the one minister at Portmoak, the other at Dunfermline. Hog took little part in the preparation of the documentt, the brethren judging it inexpedient "to mix up his name with their present proceedings in regard of his prefacing the Marrow." The Representation was tabled at the Assembly of 1721 and received rather curt treatment, being remitted to the Commission, which was to meet at the rising of the Assembly, without being read. The Commission found the matter troublesome, and it was not till their third diet in November that they had the courage to act with decision. They issued a number of queries addressed to the Marrow divines. How these were received Boston informs us: "I was clear that whatever should be the consequences we should receive and answer them. What determined

[1] *Christian Instructor*, 1831–32, p. 694 (from T. M'Crie's account there).

me to this was that I thought we were to lay our account with parting with our brethren as being cast out by them; and in that event it would be safest both for the cause of truth and our own reputation. This was agreed to, and the queries were received with a protestation. And thus they turned the cannon directly against us."[1]

The answers were prepared and forwarded to the Commission that met in March 1722: "Their answers," Boston tells us, "were, as I remember, begun by Mr. Ebenezer Erskine; but much extended and perfected by my friend Mr. Wilson: where his vast compass of reading, with his great collection of books, were of singular use, and successfully employed."[2] They are still worth reading. Perhaps the best of them is the account given of faith and assurance. "With respect to the nature of faith, they represent that the Assembly had in effect excluded from faith that act by which a person appropriates to himself what before lay in common in the gospel offer, and thereby turned it into that 'general and doubtsome faith' abjured in our national covenant; that it is notorious that our first reformers and the body of reformed divines after their time had spoken of faith in the same strain as the author of the Marrow: that though a different mode of speaking had in later times come into use, and the subscribers were well satisfied with the manner in which saving faith was described in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms, yet they never doubted that it was substantially the same with the doctrine formerly taught: that 'receiving and resting on Christ

[1] *Memoirs*, p. 364. [2] *Ibid.* p. 365.

for salvation' implies that assurance by which it had been customary for divines to describe the fiducial act or appropriating persuasion of faith . . . that the Assembly would have done more acceptable service to God had they showed the agreement between the ancient and modern way of describing faith, instead of condemning the former as erroneous, and thus inflicting a stigma on the reformed Churches."

Ebenezer Erskine had a large share in the preparation of the answers; and he and the rest bore themselves with a dignity and moderation which were a surprise to the other side. Boston unfortunately was liable to seizures of timidity and bashfulness due to bodily infirmity, and these must have weakened his case; yet he greatly impressed the brethren by his appearance in the debate, especially when he declared that while he feared the Act of 1720 would yet prove productive of much evil to the Church and the country,—in which, as we shall see, he uttered a true prophecy,—he would not impute any blame to his opponents, or insinuate any desire on their part to injure the truth. Ebenezer Erskine manifested a like spirit of charity and conciliation, avowing himself ready to retract whatever might be contrary to Scripture and the Confession. Up to this time good feeling and temper subsisted between both parties. Both sides showed every desire to be fair and honourable in their interchange of views, and the questions in dispute were probed to the bottom. Queries and answers alike were a credit to their authors, and reveal a masterly knowledge of the points in dispute. The following question is worthy of Hooker himself: "Is not the believing man

bound by the authority of the Creator to personal obedience to the moral law though not in order to justification?" and the answer of the Marrow men is as good if not better than the question: "Man ceases not to be a creature by being made a new creature: he is and ever must be bound to personal obedience to the law of the Ten Commandments by the authority of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, his Creator."

Interrogated regarding the hope of heaven and the fear of hell as motives to conduct, they rendered this weighty reply: "Taking heaven for a state of endless felicity in the enjoyment of God in Christ, we are so far from thinking that this is to be excluded from being a motive of the believer's obedience, that we think it the chief end of man next to the glory of God; but to form conceptions of heaven as a place of pleasure and happiness, without the former views of it, and to fancy that this heaven is to be obtained by our own works and doings, is unworthy of a believer and a child of God, in regard it is slavish, legal, mercenary, and carnal."

As we have said, although the controversy was warm, and hard blows were given and taken, nothing like bitterness or rancour emerged on either side. Even when the Assembly of 1722 addressed some words more plain than pleasant to Boston and his friends, they did not take it ill. Boston says: "I received the rebuke and admonition as an ornament put upon me, being for the cause of truth."[1] But an act of injustice was done at this Assembly to the Marrow men that changed the whole aspect of the controversy. Kid in their name

[1] *Memoirs*, p. 365.

had tabled a protest against the obnoxious 1720 Act, giving gold with it, as Wodrow in his quaint way tells us. How did the Assembly treat this honourable document? Instead of engrossing it in their minutes and appointing answers to be furnished to it, they covered the Marrow men with contempt by refusing to hear it read! Nothing could have been more unwise. The humiliated party returned from the House in a spirit the reverse of gentle, and at the earliest moment published broadcast their rejected document, consisting of a claim to believe, preach, and bear testimony to the condemned doctrines in face of the Assembly's interdict. Boston tells us how, on the day when this claim was flung back in their faces, the elements themselves wept for the injustice that was being done: "This affair was brought to the issue foresaid in the afternoon Session of that day; and their meeting for that black work being appointed to be at three o'clock that day, there came on a little before the hour a most dreadful storm of thunder and hail, by means whereof their meeting was for a considerable time hindered. In the time thereof I came down with some others of our number from the Westbow-head to the chamber where we attended till called; and that almost running, the street being in a manner desolate. I well remember with what serenity of mind and comfort of heart I heard the thunder of that day, the most terrible thunder-clap being just about three o'clock. It made impression on many, as Heaven's testimony against their deed they were then about to do; though in this it is not for me to determine." [1]

[1] *Memoirs*, p. 365.

The temper of parties being now roused, secession seemed inevitable, probably even deposition. The liberty claimed by the Marrow men, and claimed constitutionally enough, as we shall see, the Assembly was in no humour to allow. A bitter feud had set in which it was clear must have disastrous issues. The party of *high-flying enthusiasm*, as it was recklessly named, and that of Moderation, as it came afterwards to be rather unkindly called, must now go their separate ways. Measures to bring about separation would have been at once initiated by the latter, but they agreed to a temporary truce out of deference to the Crown, the King having in his annual letter to the Assembly found fault with ecclesiastics for their wrangling, and urged them to live in peace. "Since you cannot but foresee the many unhappy consequences with which divisions among you may be attended," he had written, the country at the time being threatened with invasion. The princely scolding had the effect of giving the Marrow men a temporary respite. Rather than offend Cæsar, the followers of Principal Hadow tolerated the affronts done to Church authority by the *high-flyers*, but they kept a close watch on them all the same. Wherever gatherings of Marrow men took place, as at Communion seasons, spies attended with the object of reporting their irregularities at headquarters. "Have you obeyed the Act of Assembly condemning the Marrow?" became a question demanded from those who were candidates for preferment. "So eager were the Church Courts at this time in guarding against the infection of the Marrow, that cases of licence, ordination, and translation were decided according to the sentiments

which the candidates were understood to hold respecting that proscribed publication." So says M'Crie.[1]

Two of the most uncompromising supporters of the Marrow revolt were Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, against whom, in 1721, a formal complaint had been brought. Ralph pleaded guilty to having taught that the believer is not under the law as a Covenant of Works. In the course of the ensuing discussion an anti-Marrow man denied that there was any gift of Christ as a Saviour to sinners of mankind, whereupon Ebenezer arose, and, in a tone of authority and gravity that commanded immediate attention, said, "Moderator, our Lord Jesus Christ said of Himself, 'My Father giveth you the true Bread from heaven'—; this He uttered to a promiscuous multitude, and *let me see the man who dare say He said wrong.*" Another valiant Marrow man was Gabriel Wilson of Maxton. He, according to Boston, was the best qualified among them all to write the history of the movement. His defence of a sermon which had met with disapprobation is a noble piece of eloquence. It is almost an anticipation of Edward Irving's elevated and fervent style of oratory. "This day I take to be a day of the Lord's jealousy and indignation on all ranks and conditions of men, and on all societies and assemblies. The anger of the Lord has set us on fire round about, yet we know it not: and though it consumes us we lay it not to heart. Of all which this present occasion, being such an one as I know not if the like, in all its circumstances, has happened in any Reformed Church since Calvin's days, is an instance none of the least

[1] *Christian Instructor*, 1832, p. 85.

notable and discernible. . . . It is known all the world over, and will be while the world lasts, that where a man's discourse is in general solid, sound, and to the purpose, little notice is taken, or severity used, as to some words or phrases though not so well chosen or fitly set: because men for most part remember themselves to be but men, who cannot promise on every occasion to write or speak infallibly ; else processes of this sort had not unto this day been such a rarity in the Churches of Christ, and particularly in the Church of Scotland. . . . I can say it in truth, though my brethren and mother's children have been very angry with me and have dealt roughly with me, my Lord and Master has not yet, to my discerning, discovered Himself displeased with me on the account of that sermon or of any one thing in it. No doubt He saw many more faults and other sort of ones than you can find: yea, the whole performance I know was full of blemishes and would not at all abide a trial at the bar of His holy law ; yet I believe He has graciously pardoned all and will never article me on that head ; which though it may be of no consideration with others, nor do I desire it should be of any, yet it is of great importance to me."[1]

The Marrow men suffered for their testimony in many irritating ways. In some cases they received their punishment from the hands of Church patrons. Neither Boston nor Ebenezer Erskine ever obtained their due place of honour in the Church. The one was "staked down in Ettrick" and the other passed over by presentees, because they were Marrow men.

[1] Boston's *Memoirs*, Appendix IV.

Another form of petty persecution was in connection with commissions to the Assembly. At that time it was usual for Presbyteries to embody on the commission of their representatives the matters they wished brought before the Assembly. We can understand the use anti-high-flyers would make of this custom. One Presbytery calls upon the Assembly to issue a second edition of the odious and illegal Act of 1720 so as to suppress the Marrow. Another calls upon the Assembly to take to task the authors of all books containing heresy and error, particularly with respect to those Antinomian errors contained in the Marrow. Another demands an immediate suppression of the mischief-making book, and the libelling of all who take upon them to defend it. These believers in a religion of "common sense" did not, however, press their points. They were for the most part content to enjoy the reputation of dignified country gentlemen who could be trusted to keep religion within bounds, and the Church from losing its head.

Dislike to the gospel preached by Boston and the Erskines centred in the Marrow doctrine of Assurance. To the party of "common sense" it savoured of irreverence when ordinary people were encouraged to talk glibly of Christ as theirs and themselves as His. Such talk they felt produced a shallow type of Christian character that easily went off into Antinomianism and hysterics. This was the honest opinion and not altogether groundless fear of those who condemned the Marrow men. Yet the insistence on Assurance, however objectionable it might be, arose as a recoil from the morbid religion prevalent in the previous

century. Seventeenth century Calvinism had laid an arrest on Christian joy. It had been fatalistic, and had robbed life of love, liberty, and gladness ; and although there were some who deplored the withering blight their religion was inflicting upon them, they clung to it still in spite of everything. They were evidently so well inoculated with Calvinistic formulæ that they had neither the will nor the capacity to break from it.

At length the time came when earnest souls began to interrogate it. If a believer is chosen in Christ from all eternity, must there not be some way whereby plain men may know whether they belong to the happy number : whereby they may be sure of their salvation ; and if so, should it not be a believer's duty to aspire to this assurance? How can one be indifferent to a matter so momentous, unless he be either given over to levity or a reprobate mind? If one is taking his religion seriously, should he not regard Assurance as equivalent to reality and sincerity, and therefore a plain and obvious requirement of the religious mind?

The Marrow men in their insistence on Assurance were much misunderstood and maligned. They were accused of undermining virtue and destroying the foundations of reverence, at least among the common people. But the fact was, that when they insisted on Assurance, it was from a desire to see religion less of a form and more of a reality than was customary. For them Christ alone could save. The question then came to be, would He, and on what terms? Their answer was as the Bread and Water of life to those who sought reality in religion. To such it was welcome because it brought liberty and life, light, peace, and joy. It

represented God as a King, who had issued a proclamation, and commanded it to be made known universally throughout the length and breadth of His kingdom, offering amnesty to all rebels and banished men, provided only they agree to lay down their arms and return peaceably to their homes; and if, in spite of this, the question of election and foreordination obtrude itself, darkening all our life, the reply of the Marrow was that so long as names are concealed and pardon is offered to all, "it is great folly in any man to say—, it may be I am not elected . . . therefore I will not accept of it nor come in. . . . Do not you say it may be I am not elected and therefore I will not believe in Christ; but rather say I do believe in Christ, and therefore I am sure I am elected; and check your heart for meddling with God's secrets and prying into His hidden counsel, and go no more beyond your bounds as you have done in this point. . . . Say then, I beseech you, with a firm faith, the righteousness of Jesus Christ belongs to all that believe; but I believe; and therefore it belongs to me. Yea, say with Paul, 'I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.' 'He saw in me' (saith Luther on the text) 'nothing but wickedness going astray and fleeing from Him. Yet this good Lord had mercy on me, and of His mere mercy He loved me, yea, so loved me that He gave Himself for me. Who is this me? Even I, a wretched and damnable sinner, was so dearly beloved of the Son of God that He gave Himself for me.'"[1]

Another offence imputed to the Marrow theology

[1] *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, p. 114.

was the inferior place given to ethics. The Marrow men were accused of indifference on the subject of virtue, as they in turn accused their opponents of indifference to grace. They pressed the duty of receiving the gospel and believing on Christ, and left it to their legalist friends to expatiate on the beauty of holiness and the duty of repentance. Both parties were really working towards the same results, but along different lines; and each was too enamoured of its own method to do justice to the other's work. The one drew an attractive picture of morals which could not be altogether barren of fruit; but the Marrow preachers knew better what they were doing, and from a perception of the sinner's true needs held up before him the power of a personal Saviour. The common people returned a verdict in favour of the Marrow statement of the case, because it brought them the help and health they needed. Nor was it lacking ethically. Faith was declared to be all in all, not as a substitute for, but a means to obedience. Faith was exhibited as the power in a man to draw from Christ a supernatural force which converted the life and supplied living principles of conduct. "To pray, to meditate, to keep a Sabbath *cheerfully*, to have your conversation in heaven, is as possible for yourself to do as for iron to swim or for stones to ascend upwards; but yet nothing is impossible to faith: it can naturalize these things unto you; it can make a mole of the earth a soul of heaven. Wherefore, though you have tried all moral conclusions of purposing, promising, resolving, bowing, fasting, watching, and self-revenge, yet get you to Christ, and with the finger of faith touch

but the hem of His garment, and you shall feel virtue come from Him for the healing of all your diseases."[1]

The Marrow logic spoke irresistibly to hard-headed Scotsmen. "I remember a man who was much enlightened in the knowledge of the gospel, who saith, 'There may be many that think that as a man chooseth to serve a prince, so men choose to serve God. So likewise they think that as those who do best service do obtain most favour of their lord: and as those that have lost it, the more they humble themselves the sooner they recover it: even so they think the case stands between God and them: whereas' (saith he) 'it is not so, but clean contrary; for He Himself saith, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you"; and not for that we repent and humble ourselves and do good works, He giveth us His grace; but we repent and humble ourselves, do good works and become holy, because He giveth us His grace. The good thief on the Cross was not illuminated because he did confess Christ, but he did confess Christ because he was illuminated. For, saith Luther on Galatians, "The tree must first be, and then the fruit: for the apples make not the tree, but the tree maketh the apples. So faith first maketh the person which afterwards bringeth forth works. Therefore to do the law without faith is to make the apples of wood and earth without the tree, which is not to make apples, but mere phantasms."'"[2]

The Marrow men survived the fire of calumny and petty persecution to which they were subjected, but while it lasted the burden was heavy. The taunt of

[1] *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, p. 176. [2] *Ibid.* p. 173.

Antinomianism was peculiarly hard to bear. They were held up as teaching that Christians are under no obligation to the Divine law, that they do not commit sin, that God sees no sin in them; that, therefore, they need not confess or crave pardon for sin. In a sense they did teach every one of these doctrines, but not in the sense imputed to them. They distinguished between the law of works and the law of Christ. They were opposed out and out to the idea of federal holiness,—holiness, that is, in order to secure heaven. To them holiness was heaven, and heaven holiness. "To ask them," as has been said,[1] "whether they thought holiness requisite in the saved, seemed to be equivalent to asking them if a man could be saved without being saved, if a man could have enjoyment of heaven without entering the Golden City." One of the main points in the Secession reasons of disruption from the Established Church — and they spoke the mind of the Scottish evangelicals—was the introduction by the semi-rationalists of a utilitarian theory of morality and religion. "God knows," said good John Livingstone, "that I would rather serve God on earth and then endure the torments of the lost, than live a life of sin on earth and then have for ever the bliss of the ransomed."

Marrow theology found a congenial home in the pulpits of the Secession Church, which came into corporate existence in 1740 as the result of the deposition of the *eight seceding ministers* that year by the General Assembly. Of the four Secession Fathers who com-

[1] Walker, *Theologians of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p. 174.

posed the historic group at Gairney Bridge seven years earlier, one was the redoubtable Ebenezer Erskine. Their main contention with the Church of their fathers was over the question of patronage and the settlement of ministers. The party of the Secession claimed for the people a voice in the selection of their pastors. Doctrinal differences also contributed to bring about the Secession ; and while the General Assembly for several years tried now to humour and now to coerce them into subjection, the time came when Erskine and his followers formulated such demands as the Church would not for a moment entertain. One was that the Assembly should take new measures to enforce evangelical preaching. Another, that the Assembly should assert the supreme Divinity of Jesus Christ, and proceed against all who denied that doctrine. Only by such demands being met were the party of Secession willing to lay down arms. But it was not to be. The National Zion could not accommodate the apostles of the new faith. If it were to be preserved and fulfil its task of building up and nourishing the spiritual life of the nation, the new wine must be put into new bottles.

CHAPTER III

HUME'S *ESSAY ON MIRACLES*

AUTHORITIES

The Life of David Hume, written by himself (prefixed to the *Essays*).

Life and Correspondence. By John Hill Burton. Edin. 1846.

Hume's *Essays*, i. ii., ed. Green. Lond. 1875.

Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature*, and *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, i. ii., ed. Green. Lond. 1874.

Hume's *History of Great Britain, during James I. and Charles I.* Edin. 1754.

Sir Leslie Stephen's *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, i. Lond. 1876.

Graham's *Social Life in Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*, ii. Lond. 1899.

Scots Magazine for 1756.

Carlyle's *Autobiography.* Lond. 1860.

Paley's *Evidences: Preparatory Considerations.* Edin. 1833.

Calderwood's *Hume.* The "Famous Scots" Series.

Wace's *Christianity and Agnosticism.* Edin. 1895.

Latham's *Pastor Pastorum.* Camb. 1894.

Dug. Stewart's *Account of the Life and Writings of Principal Robertson.* Edin. 1834.

IT is the pleasant fashion of the hour to speak of David Hume in highly eulogistic terms. A biographer in the twentieth century is disposed to make much of his amiableness, and even to excuse his scepticism. Probably this is fair enough. Certainly it is what we might have expected. In religious circles

Hume's name used to be held in horror. Now, the world is hastening to make what reparation it can, to one who has made even the Church his debtor.

His immediate circle of friends always admired him. His heterodoxies might send a cold shudder through them, still they *loved him* immeasurably. Boswell's attitude was probably that of many—"I always lived on good terms with Mr. Hume, though I have frankly told him I was not clear that it was right of me to keep company with him; but, said I, how much better are you than your books. He was charitable to the poor, and many an agreeable hour have I passed with him." Some expected he would change his opinions before he died, or die amid agony and horror; but his views were never altered, and he passed out of the world as peacefully as a saint. Life on the whole had brought him a full cup of happiness; better still, he possessed the power of extracting joy from the simplest pleasures. "I dine," he tells us, "I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours' amusement I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold and strained and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther."[1] What a lovable man! How delightful his preference for simple fireside pleasures to the ambitious problems of metaphysical inquiry! It reminds us of what Carlyle of Inveresk tells about his "infidelity"—that it was skin-deep, and did not come from the heart or from fixed principles of the mind, but from the pride of intellect and love of vainglory.

[1] *Treatise on Human Nature*, i. 548.

That was Carlyle's opinion, and he supports it with a story about Hume's manner of receiving the news of his mother's death. He and a friend were together in London when the intelligence reached him. On hearing it Hume gave way to a flood of tears. "My friend," said his comrade, "you owe this uncommon grief to your having thrown off the principles of religion; for if you had not, you would have been consoled by the firm belief that the good lady, who was not only the best of mothers but the most pious of Christians, was now completely happy in the realms of the just." To which Hume replied, "Though I threw out my speculations to entertain and employ the learned and metaphysical world, yet in other things I do not think so differently from the rest of mankind as you may imagine."[1] We have a touching object-lesson on the duty of Christian kindness from Hume's services to the homeless Rousseau. That ill-starred son of genius had no better friend than David Hume when all the virtuous world conspired against him and closed its doors. His good qualities were well known to the better class of people in his own generation; and they extolled him so highly that, as he jocularly said, he was become clean and white as the driven snow; "Were I to be proposed for the See of Lambeth, no objection could be henceforth taken to me!"

Hume spent a considerable period of his life in Paris, as the English Ambassador's secretary, at a time when France was taking the lead in philosophy and ruling the world of letters. He was in his element in the society of the *savants*, who in their turn lionised

[1] Carlyle's *Autobiography*, p. 273.

him and introduced his books to the French reading public. Principal Robertson received from him an amusing sketch of his life in Paris: "Do you ask me about my course of life? I can only say that I eat nothing but ambrosia, drink nothing but nectar, breathe nothing but incense, and tread on nothing but flowers."

Possessed of a sunny temperament, he found it possible to live on friendly terms with his worst opponents. More wonderful, he drew from them a reciprocation of the friendship. The correspondence that passed with Dr. Campbell of Aberdeen sets this forth in a manner highly creditable to both. Campbell had come forward in defence of miracles, and Hume writes that he considered himself highly honoured in being thought worthy the notice of so eminent a divine; and Campbell replies, "I could scarce have thought that, in spite of differences of a more interesting nature, even such as regards morals and religion, you could ever force me to love and honour you as a man. Yet no religious prejudices (as you would probably term them) can hinder me from doing justice to that goodness and candour which appear in every line of your letter."[1] Reid acknowledged that he had learned more from the sceptic's writings than from all other philosophers together; and an Aberdeen philosophic society, in expressing its obligation for his writings, paid him the compliment of saying: "Your company would, although we are all good Christians, be more accept able than that of St. Athanasius."

All this was in the manner of eighteenth-century

[1] *Life*, by Hill Burton, ii. p. 118.

geniality,—a geniality, however, that was seldom extended to the Deists of that period. Yet Hume was generally supposed to be a far more dangerous person than the ordinary Deist, which made the compliments showered on him all the more remarkable. It is true he was subjected to a particularly mean form of persecution from certain quarters of society, and his manner of writing did not conciliate, but needlessly annoyed his opponents. Hume lacked sympathy and imagination; and on the intellectual side was over-developed, which made people say that though he had seen the best art collections in the world, he was never known to praise a picture, or go into raptures over a piece of antique sculpture. It was this want of enthusiasm for the poetry of life that made him insensible to the glamours of war and the claims of hero-worship, things in which his countrymen have revelled. But although he had no interest in the life of warriors or the work of artists, he had a consummate appreciation of authorship and intellectual composition. "No Scotsman," says his principal biographer, "could write a book of respectable talent without calling forth his loud and warm eulogiums. On those who were even his rivals, in his own particular walk, Adam Smith, Robertson, Ferguson, and Henry, he heaped honest, hearty commendation. He urged them to write: he raised the spirit of literary ambition in their breasts: he found publishers for their works; and when these were completed, he trumpeted the praises of the author through society."[1]

Hume's perpetual attitude of revolt from authority,

[1] Hill Burton's *Life of Hume*, ii. 32.

even from the authority of reason itself, was sufficient to repel his countrymen, for whom the support given by authority is indispensable, whether of reason, religion, or tradition. One who would essay the task Hume took upon him, the emancipation of his fellow-men from error and delusion, must beware of treading roughly on old habits of thought and deeply-rooted prejudice. As Bunyan said of the religious guides of his day, "It is not every one who should handle the snuffers; lest instead of mending the light they put out the candle." Hume disregarded this caution. The last person in the world to persecute a man for his opinions, he failed in the respect and consideration for the views of others which is happily common now. Owing to this defect in his character, he succeeded both in alarming the religious public of his time unnecessarily, and in bringing upon himself no small measure of violent dislike.

Hume published his first and most important work, *The Treatise of Human Nature*, when he was twenty-eight years of age. It fell still-born from the press, or so he mistakenly thought, from the fact that it did not arouse a murmur of disapproval from the zealots. The full title of the work plainly set forth its aim. "*A Treatise of Human Nature*, being an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects." As a thoroughgoing acquaintance with Nature only comes from close observation and experiment, and never from attention to the whims and presuppositions of the mind, so in the higher spheres of ethics and thought man's only guide, philosopher, and friend is human nature itself, his experience and interrogation of it. That the proper study of mankind

is man, every one will allow; but few know what Herculean labours that study involves. Hume guessed what it meant, and accordingly repaired to France, where for three years he shut himself up in solitude to think out the subject. At the end of that time he emerged from his studies a philosophic sceptic. Starting where Locke and Berkeley ended, he advanced into regions which previous thinkers left unexplored, and arrived at the conclusion that the impressions of the senses and the ideas which we derive from them constitute the sum-total of all our knowledge. When we employ the familiar terms *cause* and *effect*, we usually talk as though some necessary and invariable nexus bound them together; but of such nexus we have not the smallest vestige of proof. "Our memory presents us only with a multitude of instances, but from the mere repetition of any past impression even to infinity there never will arrive any new original idea such as that of a necessary connection." "Suppose two objects to be presented to us of which the one is the cause and the other is the effect, 'tis plain that from the simple consideration of one or both these objects we shall never perceive the tie by which they are united, or be able certainly to pronounce that there is a connexion between them."[1] "The several instances of resembling conjunctions lead us into the notions of power and necessity. These instances are in themselves totally distinct from each other, and have no union but in the mind, which observes them and collects their ideas."[2] "What we call a *mind* is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions united

[1] *Treatise on Human Nature*, i. 457. [2] *Ibid.* i. 459.

together by certain relations, and supposed, though falsely, to be endowed with a perfect simplicity and identity."[1] "The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance, pass, repass, glide away and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations."[2] These extracts clearly define and describe Hume's violent departure in philosophy. Locke had argued in favour of some unknown thing called *substance* behind the qualities of matter. Berkeley followed with the denial that any evidence existed that there was such a thing. And next came Hume, carrying the destructive process a step farther. He denied, as we see, that we have any evidence of the substance called *mind* distinct from particular perceptions. When asked whence come the constancy and coherence of certain impressions like those of cause and effect, for reply he pointed to the law of association. Reid met Hume by showing that an intuitive perception of an external world accompanied our sensations. Surely, if we have impressions, they imply something impressed as well as something impressing, without which no impression could be experienced.

The result of Hume's investigations into human nature was certainly dismal and disappointing enough:

> "sails rent
> And rudder broken—reason impotent—
> Affections all unfixed."

But it has to be borne in mind that progress here has never been like a river, an onward flowing movement, continuous and unceasing. More happily has it been

[1] *Treatise on Human Nature*, i. 495. [2] *Ibid.* i. 534.

compared to the ascent of a spiral staircase, a movement ever upwards indeed, but slowly, tortuously, and round about. The philosophic scepticism of Hume was an eventful stage in a long journey; succeeding systems of thought profited by it, received from it fresh inspiration and a new starting-point.

A glance at Hume's work as a historian will enable us to see how he revelled in scepticism and at the same time found refuge from it, history opening before him fields of objectivity and experience into which he escaped from philosophic doubt. The early parts of his *History of England* have small merits as compared with the later,—the material for the earlier periods not then being to hand. But in the volume which he wrote first, which covers the Stuart period, he summarises the social and political results of the various reigns in a comprehensive, masterly fashion. Certain passages which he afterwards suppressed gave mortal offence as they appeared in their original form, as when he calls the Reformation "the Protestant Fanaticism"; the Catholic Church "the Romish Superstition"; Oliver Cromwell "a fanatical hypocrite." Of the popular theology of the day he said: "As far as any coherence can be traced among the systems of modern theology, we may observe that the doctrine of absolute decrees has ever been intimately connected with the enthusiastic spirit; as it affords the highest subject of joy, triumph, and security to the supposed elect, and exalts them by infinite degrees above the rest of mankind." Of the famous Covenant of 1638 he declared that it "consisted first of a renunciation of popery formerly signed by James in his youth, and composed of the most furious

and most virulent invectives with which any human beings had ever inflamed their breast to an unrelenting animosity against their fellow-creatures." Piety, provokingly indifferent to his Treatise, made up for its neglect by waxing furiously indignant at these gibing outbursts. Nor did it atone for the wantonness of the offending passages that in others he patronised Puritanism, and even flattered it; as when he says, "Though the religious schemes of the Puritans when explained appear many of them pretty frivolous, we are not thence to imagine that they were pursued by none but fools"; or, "'Tis remarkable that that party made the privileges of the nation as much a part of their religion as the Church party did the prerogatives of the Crown." The reader will now be prepared to hear that Hume set the heather on fire at last, and roused the Scottish Kirk, usually so sedate and self-controlled, to a state of excitement, if not alarm.

The *Essay on Miracles*, usually regarded as a formidable piece of assault on the foundations of Christianity, came to be written in a quite unpremeditated manner. Writing to his foeman Dr. Campbell, he gives the following account of its composition. "It may perhaps amuse you to learn the first hint which suggested to me that argument which you have so strenuously attacked. I was walking in the cloisters of the Jesuits' College of La Flèche, a town in which I passed two years of my youth, and engaged in a conversation with a Jesuit of some parts and learning, who was relating to me and urging some nonsensical miracle performed lately in their convent, when I was tempted to dispute against him; and as my head was full of the topics of

my *Treatise of Human Nature* which I was at that time composing, this argument immediately occurred to me, and I thought it very much gravelled my companion ; but at last he observed to me that it was impossible for that argument to have any solidity, because it operated equally against the Gospel as the Catholic miracles, which observation I thought proper to admit as a sufficient answer. I believe you will allow that the freedom at least of this reasoning makes it somewhat extraordinary to have been the produce of a Convent of Jesuits, though perhaps you may think the sophistry of it savours plainly of the place of its birth."[1]

Here, then, be it noticed, Hume discarded the miracles of the Gospel tradition without ever having applied any severe and conscientious research to the subject. On his own confession, he slumped Christian and ecclesiastical miracles together in one indistinguishable heap, and rejected them in a body on the general ground of the insufficiency and unreliableness of human testimony. Remembering this, one is amazed at the confidence with which he says, "I flatter myself that I have discovered an argument of a like nature (to Tillotson's argument against transubstantiation), which, if just, will with the wise and learned be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently will be useful as long as the world endures ; for so long, I presume, will the accounts of miracles and prodigies be found in all history, sacred and profane."[2]

What was the discovery of which he so grandiloquently boasts? A series of extracts from the famous *Essay* will answer the question. "Our evidence, then,

[1] *Life*, by Hill Burton, i. 57. [2] *Essays*, ii. 89.

for the truth of the *Christian* religion is less than the evidence for the truth of our senses: because even in the first authors of our religion it was no greater: and it is evident it must diminish in passing from them to their disciples: nor can any one rest such confidence in their testimony as in the immediate object of his senses."[1] "No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish."[2] "I beg the limitations here made may be remarked, when I say that a miracle can never be proved so as to be the foundation of a system of religion. For I own that otherwise there may possibly be miracles."[3] "There is not to be found in all history any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men of such unquestioned good sense, education, and learning as to secure us against all delusions in themselves: of such undoubted integrity as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time attesting facts, performed in such a public manner and in so celebrated a part of the world as to render the detection unavoidable: all which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men."[4]

In his reply Campbell cited the case of a comet. The chances against a comet appearing in a given part of the sky at a given moment are practically infinite. All the presumptions are against its appearance. Yet

[1] *Essays*, ii. 88.
[2] *Ibid.* ii. 94.
[3] *Ibid.* ii. 105.
[4] *Ibid.* ii. 94.

when an astronomer of accepted authority announces that it may be looked for at the given place and time, almost the whole intelligent world will believe him. Why? Why is his *ipse dixit* accredited? And why because the comet appeared once ages ago does he anticipate its reappearance as an occurrence that may be infallibly foretold? To say in answer, that a fact uncommon in our experience need not be in contradiction to it, is in reality no answer. The point in dispute is whether a miracle is contrary to all experience. Paley put this point well. Hume had said it was not contrary to experience that testimony should be false, but it was contrary to experience that a miracle should be true. Whose experience, asks Paley, do you refer to? Your own, or universal experience? If the former be meant, of course it is true enough. If the latter, that is the whole question in dispute.

Paley scored also when he pointed out the absurdity of expecting the miraculous events that occurred in Palestine to be repeated now. Assuming a miracle to be a particular volition of Deity for other ends than can be secured in the ordinary course of Nature, to expect it to be repeated would be to make it cease to be a miracle. In Paley's view, Hume's argument came to this, either the course of Nature is fixed and invariable, or, if there are variations to it, they must be of frequent occurrence; either proposition being a glaring *petitio principii*. Might it not suit the Almighty's purposes better that the variations should be few and infrequent?

Paley again objected that Hume is content with denying the miracles; but he should have gone a step farther, and accounted for their being believed in at the

first. Later anti-supernaturalists like Strauss ventured thus far and propounded the mythical theory. We need not wonder that Hume made no similar attempt. As we have seen, he wrote his essay against the miracles of the Gospels without having looked at the subject at all. Paley brought the controversy between Hume and himself to an end by a series of trenchant strokes. "If twelve men whose probity and good sense I had long known should seriously and circumstantially relate to me an account of a miracle wrought before their eyes and in which it was impossible that they should be deceived; if the governor of the country, hearing a rumour of this account, should call these men into his presence and offer them a short proposal, either to confess the imposture or submit to be tied up to a gibbet; if they should refuse with one voice to acknowledge that there existed any falsehood or imposture in the case; if this threat were communicated to them separately, yet with no different effect; if it was at last executed; if I myself saw them one after another consenting to be racked, burnt, or strangled rather than give up the truth of their account—still, if Mr. Hume's rule be my guide, I am not to believe them. Now I undertake to say that there exists not a sceptic in the world who would not believe them, or who would defend such incredulity."[1]

Paley's argument, admirable though it be, produced little or no effect on the disciples of Hume. The difference between the two men went deeper than the mere question of miracles. To those who accepted the Christian conception of God, miracle presented no difficulty. A Being whose purpose was to reveal to

[1] *Works*, p. 299.

mankind a knowledge of Himself such as we could not otherwise obtain, would be most likely, one would think, to work along the supernatural lines described in the Bible. On the other hand, a revelation of the kind there said to be given was incredible and unintelligible to thinkers of the school of Hume. Their God was not the Christian's God. His methods of operation differed from the Christian's idea of the Divine working as His nature and being differed, and no amount of faultless logic could ever heal the breach between controversialists who disagreed so widely on the fundamental points at issue.

Had Hume been a prudent man, he would have given his essay a different title. He might easily and quite accurately have named it *An Examination of Human Testimony*. That would have offended no one, and the Church Courts would have hesitated to interpose. But the title *Essay on Miracles* had the sound of defiance in it, and was taken as a challenge. Hints accordingly began to circulate that he was to be prosecuted before the Courts of the Church on a charge of heresy. One of the first calls to arms was the publication in 1755 of a pamphlet, entitled "An Analysis of the moral and religious sentiments contained in the writings of Sopho (that is, Lord Kames) and David Hume, Esq., addressed to the consideration of the reverend and honourable members of General Assembly of the Church of Scotland." The writer declared it to be his design "to analyse the works of these celebrated authors, giving their own expressions under the different heads to which they seem to belong." He gives the quotations correctly enough, but there is mischief in the headlines

under which he groups them—; "All distinction between virtue and vice is merely imaginary"; "Adultery is very lawful, but sometimes not expedient." More pamphlets appeared at this time, many of them fitted to inflame the public mind against Hume. One of them bore the title, "The Deist stretched on a Deathbed; or a lively portraiture of a dying infidel."

When the General Assembly met that year, a resolution was passed expressing the Church's "utmost abhorrence" of "impious and infidel principles," and "of the deepest concern on account of the prevalence of infidelity and immorality, the principles whereof have been to the disgrace of our age and nation so openly avowed in several books published of late in this country, and which are but too well known amongst us." Many, not content with a general blast against infidelity, pressed the instituting of a formal process against the authors. Their views found expression in a pamphlet which appeared after the rising of the Assembly, and was widely circulated through the country, bearing the title, "Infidelity a proper object of censure." At the next Assembly an attempt was made to bring Hume to account, but it completely failed. The overture proposed ran in these terms: "The General Assembly, judging it their duty to do all in their power to check the growth and progress of infidelity, and considering that, as infidel writings have begun of late years to be published in this nation, against which they have hitherto only testified in general, so there is one person, styling himself David Hume, Esq., who hath arrived at such a degree of boldness as publicly to avow himself the author of books containing the most

rude and open attacks upon the glorious Gospel of Christ, and principles evidently subversive even of natural religion and the foundations of morality, if not establishing direct atheism, therefore the Assembly appoint the following persons . . . . as a Committee to inquire into the writings of this author, to call him before them and prepare the matter for the next General Assembly."

The overture failed to gain the favour of the Assembly for many reasons. It was objected to it that many members had not read the writings in question, and therefore could not be proper judges of them; that nothing that the Assembly could do being likely to convince Mr. Hume, no good purpose would be served by instituting a process against him; that the process would necessitate a prolonged and arduous inquiry; that the opinions in question being universally detested could not injure any one's faith; that metaphysical errors should not be punished as severely as moral delinquencies; that the prosecution of Mr. Hume could have but one result, namely, the increased sale of his books; that Mr. Hume did not profess to be a member of the Church, and was therefore beyond her jurisdiction. The discussion turned on the last of these propositions. Those demanding a trial denied that Hume was outside the pale of the Church and no subject for Church censure. They reminded the Assembly that he had been baptized by the Church and had never renounced his baptism; that he frequently spoke in his books of "our holy religion"; that professing Christians were known to hold voluntary communication with him, and even

clergymen were in the habit of conversing freely with him, which it was presumed they would not be likely to do if he were no Christian. Speaking of this quaint debate, the *Scots' Magazine* of 1756, after giving a report of the proceedings, informs us that it was carried on "with abundance of decency without any violent altercation or personal reflections." It was certainly well that the Assembly declined to prosecute Hume. Not that they regarded his errors lightly. Mid-eighteenth century society might be Laodicean, but it was orthodox. However the spirit of religious indifference might prevail, there was a great deal of deference paid to the Church. Hume himself on one occasion recommended a young disciple of his own, who had a hankering after the pulpit, to enter the Church's ministry. The Church was a power, therefore, and no one could touch her with impunity.

Hume, as we have already said, was made to suffer for his scepticisms. For many a day one appointment after another passed him by. The old *Edinburgh Review* of 1755 came to grief on its second issue because he was suspected of having a connection with it, the fact being that the promoters of the new venture purposely kept him out of their arrangements for fear of public opinion.[1] Yet the Church allowed him to go his way without any formal censure. This, as we have said, was well. It would have been irregular for a Court of the Church to bring a charge against one who was not a responsible member of her communion.

At this distance of time, Hume's scepticism is

[1] Calderwood's *Hume*, p. 137.

seen to have conferred considerable benefit on both philosophy and religion. Strictly regarded, it was not religious scepticism at all, but philosophic, that Hume championed with such remarkable power and genius. He never seemed to doubt that religion rested on solid ground, only it was on a foundation of faith and not reason. "Look out for a people," he said, "entirely destitute of religion, and if you find them at all, be assured that they are but a few degrees removed from the brutes."[1] "The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author, and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of a genuine Theism and Religion."[2] "I never asserted so absurd a proposition as that anything might arise without a cause: only I maintained that our certainty of the falsehood of that proposition proceeded neither from intuition nor demonstration, but from another source. That Cæsar existed, that there is such an island as Sicily,—for these propositions I affirm we have no demonstration nor intuitive proof. Would you infer that I deny their *truth* or even their certainty? There are many different kinds of certainty, and some of them as satisfactory to the mind though perhaps not so regular as the demonstrative kind."[3] Hume the thinker might be a confirmed sceptic; Hume the man was probably a sincere believer.

Nor is this enough in estimating his character and work. It is saying the least that can be said, that by

[1] *Natural History of Religion*, Section XI.
[2] *Essays*, ii. 309.
[3] Hill Burton's *Life*, i. 97.

his criticisms of religion, which is what mainly concerns us here, the Church of God has been led into deeper and more spiritual views of its message to the world. If Hume shook our confidence in the authority of human reason, if he brought down its pride, so to speak, and exposed its unreliableness as an instrument of knowledge, he wrought, albeit unconsciously, a grateful service to the Christian religion. He made the claims of revelation thereby receive greater attention than before, and room was cleared for faith to breathe in. Even his attack on miracles was no disservice to Christianity. It compelled the Church to re-examine her lines of defence and to adopt truer methods of apologetic. Hitherto she had relied on her external credentials; and Hume, the supposed enemy of the Church, did the Church the service of bringing this blunder to light. Nineteenth century apologetic turned its attention with many beneficent results to the internal evidences, to what by Dr. Chalmers' time was called "the self-evidencing power of the Bible"; "the manifestation of truth to the conscience"; "the experimental evidence for the faith"; and in this direction she discovered her strength to lie. Historical criticism of the Bible — unknown in Hume's day—has shown us Old Testament prophecy pursuing the same wise course, leaning more on the intrinsic value of its divine message to the world than on such outward support as ecstasy and prediction provided. In like manner the Christian teacher of the present time derives his authority not from the possession of inerrant and infallible books, nor from the tradition of a miraculous origin to the

faith. His appeal on behalf of the claims of Christianity consists rather in pointing to what it has done and is doing for human souls, to its contributions to the moral and material improvement of the world, and to its work in regenerating the spiritual and social life of mankind.

CHAPTER IV

THE PLAYHOUSE BATTLE

AUTHORITIES

Life and Works of Home. By Henry Mackenzie. Lond. 1822.
The Morality of Stage Plays seriously considered. By Adam Ferguson. Edin. 1757.
Carlyle of Inveresk's *Argument to prove that the Tragedy of Douglas ought to be Publickly burnt by the hands of the Hangman.* Edin. 1757.
Witherspoon's *Serious Enquiry into the nature and effects of the Stage.* Edin. 1815.
Admonition and Exhortation. By the Presbytery of Edinburgh. Edin. 1757.
The Scots' Magazine of the time.
Poems of Allan Ramsay. Edin. (Oliver's ed.).
Life of Allan Ramsay. ("Famous Scots" Series.)
Pamphlets, Ballads, and Pasquinades of the time.
Carlyle's *Autobiography.* Edin. 1860.
Dugald Stewart's *Life of Principal Robertson.* Edin. 1834.

IN 1756 there appeared on the boards of the Edinburgh playhouse the tragedy of *Douglas*, written by John Home, minister of Athelstaneford. The event aroused tremendous excitement, and almost created an epoch in the social and literary development of the country. Seldom before had the poetic muse visited a Scottish manse,—although, by the way, Home's predecessor at Athelstaneford had been Blair, author of *The Grave;* but from about this time we can

discern an advance in intellectual refinement, an appreciation of the elegancies of oral and written speech, and an ambition for literary attainment and fame, especially on the part of the occupants of the pulpit. The sensation created by the acting of Home's play may be guessed from Henry Mackenzie's graphic description: "I was then a boy," he says, "but of an age to be sometimes admitted as a sort of page to the tea-drinking parties of Edinburgh. I have a perfect recollection of the strong sensation which *Douglas* excited among its inhabitants. The men talked of the rehearsals; the ladies repeated what they had heard of the story; some had procured as a great favour copies of the most striking passages, which they recited at the earnest request of the company. I was present at the representation; the applause was enthusiastic; but a better criterion of its merits was the tears of the audience, which the tender part of the drama drew forth unsparingly. 'The town,' says Dr. Carlyle (and I can vouch how truly), 'was in an uproar of exultation that a Scotsman should write a tragedy of the first rate, and that its merits were first submitted to them.'"[1]

Home had sounded David Garrick about bringing out the tragedy in London, but without success. The famous actor would have none of it. It was in his opinion too dull and spiritless for a metropolitan audience. Garrick, however, learned to admire Home's dramatic genius, and acknowledged that *Agis*—another of his plays—was nearer Shakespeare than anything attained by other playwrights. This was high praise indeed.

[1] *Life and Works of John Home*, by H. Mackenzie, i. 38.

To the first efforts of the clerical dramatist the elder Sheridan was more friendly, sending him a gold medal to mark his appreciation of *Douglas*. From David Hume a tribute came to the author's genius which must have greatly encouraged him, although it sounds overdone. In dedicating a volume of essays to him, he said: "It is less my admiration of your fine genius which has engaged me to make this address to you, than my esteem of your character and my affection to your person. That generosity of mind which ever accompanies you, that cordiality of friendship, that spirited honour and integrity, have long interested me strongly in your behalf, and have made me desirous that a monument of our mutual amity should be publicly erected, and, if possible, be preserved to posterity. I own, too, that I have the ambition to be the first who shall in public express his admiration of your noble tragedy of *Douglas;* one of the most interesting and pathetic pieces that was ever exhibited on any theatre. Should I give it the preference to the *Merope* of Massei, and to that of Voltaire, which it resembles in its subject; should I affirm that it contained more fire and spirit than the former, more tenderness and simplicity than the latter, I might be accused of partiality; and how could I entirely acquit myself after the professions of friendship which I have made you? But the unfeigned tears which flowed from every eye in the numerous representations which were made of it on this theatre; the unparalleled command which you appear to have over every affection of the human breast,—these are incontestable proofs that you possess the true theat-

rical genius of Shakespeare and Otway, refined from the unhappy barbarism of the one and licentiousness of the other."[1] This exaggerated encomium afforded good sport to the dealers in doggerel. One of the "ballads" of the time was irresistibly amusing:

> "Your namesake does prefer you to
> Shakespear and Otway baith, Johny;
> And glad am I he has made this
> Confession of his faith, Johny.
>
> For now he seems in a fair way
> The Scriptur to receive, Johny;
> No more will he scoff and deride,
> But *miracles* believe, Johny.
>
> When he's converted, mony ane
> Of this new saint will say, Johny:
> He's the first sinner who owns his
> Salvation to a play, Johny."

The verdict of posterity has been, on the whole, favourable to *Douglas*. As regards the plan of the play, critics have not a few faults to find; but for well-sustained monologue, for elevated diction and animated characterisation, above all, for the commingling of passion and pathos, the tragedy holds a high and deserving place. The story was based on the old Scots poem "Gil Morrice"; and as our sober ancestors were moved to tears by the successive woes of Matilda and her long-lost son, it is evident that of the elements of misfortune and disaster the tragedy of *Douglas* was all compact. Two young men, sons of the alien houses of Douglas and Malcolm, and sworn friends of one another, succeed in arrang-

[1] Hume's *Works*.

ing a secret marriage between the former and Matilda, the sister of the latter. The two fall in battle, and Matilda is at once left a widow, and on the eve of motherhood. The newborn infant is stealthily sent away from his mother under the care of a nurse, and is believed to have perished in the crossing of a flood-swollen river. He returns, however, a grown man, under the name of Norval, but as yet ignorant of his noble parentage. Instead of his happy return bringing good fortune to his overjoyed mother and him, disaster after disaster overwhelm them both. In one day he slays his enemy the hateful Glenalvon, and dies from a wound received from the villain; and the mother, losing her reason, commits suicide by casting herself over a lofty precipice. By the time the play closes, our feelings of sympathy for the noble mother and son are wound up to an almost unbearable pitch of grief, for we have learned to love them both,—the one for her pure and powerful feelings of motherhood, the other for his lofty sense of honour and for his courage. The story of his romantic upbringing is told in lines still familiar:

> "My name is Norval: on the Grampian hills
> My father feeds his flocks; a frugal swain,
> Whose constant cares were to increase his store,
> And keep his only son, myself, at home."

Immediately on the appearance of *Douglas* in the playhouse, many of the clergy, those in Edinburgh especially, were roused to a state of wrath that one of their number should think so lightly of his sacred office as to cater for the entertainment of theatre-goers

by producing a play full of profane oaths, and countenancing the awful sin of suicide. They were the more inflamed with what they regarded as an unprecedented prostitution of the clerical calling, by reports of a rehearsal having taken place, in which clergy as well as laity, in association with actors and actresses, strutted on the boards of a theatre taking the parts assigned to them. Nor was their anger confined to the reckless men who brought the scandal upon the Church. It burst forth furiously on certain brethren in the ministry who countenanced the profanity by attending the performance of the play in the theatre. Among those singled out as guilty of both offences was Dr. Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk.

The irate Presbytery of Edinburgh gave expression to its wounded feelings in an *Admonition and Exhortation* addressed to all whom it concerned, with an accompanying letter to the Presbyteries to which the offenders belonged. That document began by bewailing the declining state of religion, the open profanation of the Sabbath, the contempt of public worship, the increasing luxury and levity of the age. At a time when Divine Providence was scourging the land with poverty and war, how shameful that the ministers of Christ should be supporting the playhouse, and setting an example so evil before apprentices and students and other light-headed persons! "When our gracious Sovereign, attentive to the voice of Providence, is calling from the throne to humiliation and prayer, how unseemly is it for his subjects to give themselves up to mirth and jollity! When war in which we are engaged and many awful tokens of the

divine displeasure bespeak us in the language of an inspired writer *to redeem the time because the days are evil*, should that time be squandered away in running the constant round of foolish not to say sinful amusements? When the wants and cries of the numerous poor require extraordinary supplies, how unaccountable is it to lavish away vast sums for such vain and idle purposes! When the wisdom of the nation has guarded the inhabitants of this city and suburbs from the infection of the stage by a plain and express statute, is it not a high instance of folly to break down that barrier and open a door with their own hands for theatrical representations, which are in many respects no less inconsistent with good policy than unfriendly to religion, and will be found sooner or later to affect their temporal as well as spiritual interests?"

This *Admonition* brought most of the offending brethren to their knees. One, in extenuation of his offence, pleaded that he had never darkened the door of a theatre before, that he would never do so again, and that on the occasion in question he had sat in a corner of the house so as not to be seen! Yet his unrelenting judges sentenced him to six weeks' suspension. The Glasgow clergy joined hands with their Edinburgh brethren in anathematising the stage, characterised actors and actresses as *dissolute* persons, declared it vain to expect any reformation of the theatre, and called upon the next General Assembly to take action. The Presbytery of Duns alone resented the interference of the Edinburgh Presbytery, and reminded it of what was enacted in the *Form of*

Process—"That nothing ought to be admitted by any Church judicature as the ground of a process for censure but what hath been declared censurable by the Word of God, or some act or universal custom of this national Church agreeable thereto." "We expected," the brethren of the Duns Presbytery continued, "that in compliance with this known statute you would have mentioned some passages of scripture or some acts of the General Assembly to which the conduct of our brethren was repugnant. However, to make up the want of such authority, you give us a detail of certain acts and proceedings of your Rev. presbytery in the year 1727. Whatever regard may be due to these, we are persuaded you do not apprehend they should be considered as standards of this Church. Nor can we believe you will think a minister of the presbytery of Duns should be accounted criminal because he did not pay suitable regard to the acts of your Rev. presbytery. You say zeal for vindicating the credit and promoting the usefulness of the holy ministry and supporting the interests of religion are the motives of your present conduct. And in charity we are bound to believe they are. You must, however, excuse us when we say that your intermeddling in the manner you have done with the conduct of your brethren, who have hitherto been eminently useful in our bounds, hath a natural tendency and will undoubtedly, unless guarded against by the utmost prudence and caution on our part, greatly mar and obstruct those valuable ends you seem to have in view."[1]

[1] *Scots' Magazine*, xix. 215.

Nor was Carlyle of Inveresk the man to brook interference from outside quarters, and even when his own Presbytery threatened to libel him for his theatrical offences he refused to submit meekly. "On deliberating about this affair," he says,[1] "with all the knowledge I had of the laws of the Church and the confidence I had in the goodwill of my parish, I took a firm resolution not to submit to what I saw the Presbytery intended, but to stand my ground on a firm opinion that my offence was not a foundation for a libel, but, if anything at all, a mere impropriety or offence against decorum, which ought to be done at privy censures by an admonition. This ground I took and never departed from it; but I, at the same time, resolved to mount my horse and visit every member of the Presbytery, especially my opponents, and by a free confession endeavour to bring them over to my opinion. They received me differently—some with a contemptible dissimulation, and others with a provoking reserve and haughtiness. I saw that they had the majority of the Presbytery on their side, and that the cabal was firm, and that no submission on my part would turn them aside from their purpose. This confirmed my resolution not to yield, but to run every risk rather than furnish an example of tame submission, not merely to a fanatical but an illegal exertion of power, which would have stamped disgrace on the Church of Scotland, kept the younger clergy for half a century longer in the trammels of bigotry or hypocrisy, and debarred every generous spirit from entering into orders."

[1] *Autobiography*, p. 315.

A libel was served against this *Prince of Moderates*, charging him with keeping company, familiarly conversing, and eating and drinking with West Diggs, one of the actors on the unlicensed stage or theatre at the head of the Canongate of Edinburgh commonly called the Concert Hall, or with Miss Sarah Ward, an actress on the said theatre—, "persons that do not reside in his parish, and who by their profession and in the eye of the law are of bad fame, and who cannot obtain from any minister a testimonial of their moral character; and he, the said Mr. Alexander Carlyle, did not only appear publicly in the said unlicensed theatre, but took possession of a box in a disorderly manner, and turned some gentlemen out of it in a forcible manner, and did there witness the acting or representation of the foresaid tragedy called *Douglas*, when acted for hire or reward, in which the name of God was profaned or taken in vain by mock prayers and tremendous oaths, such as—'by the blood of the Cross' and 'the wounds of Him who died for us on the accursed tree.'" The case went against Carlyle in the inferior court, but on appeal to the Synod his prosecution by libel was condemned, while he was discharged with a censure. This mild decision was sustained by the General Assembly; but at the same time the clergy were prohibited from being concerned in or countenancing theatrical representations. Thus ended the theatrical scandal case in probably the only way possible to wise men, but leaving the gulf that separated the two parties in the Church wider than before.

The *Douglas* controversy produced a rich crop of

pamphlets and pasquinades. The best written in defence of the theatre was "The morality of stage plays seriously considered." The author was Adam Ferguson the philosopher, in whose house in Edinburgh the memorable meeting of Robert Burns and young Walter Scott took place. Ferguson in his pamphlet argues that no composition is to be condemned merely because it is in the form of a play. To do so would be to condemn Holy Scripture itself, St. Paul quoting from the play of a Greek dramatist in 1 Cor. xv. 33. The only law of the Church against theatre-going is an Act of Assembly, 1574, declaring "that no comedies or tragedies or such plays should be made on any subject of canonical scriptures nor on the Sabbath-day. If any minister be the writer of such a play he shall be deprived of his ministry. As for plays of another subject, they also should be examined before they be propounded publicly." Dealing with the influence of the theatre on the young, he appeals to persons who have the care of the education of youth "whether they would not gladly see their pupils come to the theatre and mix with grave and decent company if by that means they could break up more dangerous meetings for low gaming and riot, where youth has no good example to lead them, and no restraint from a sense of decency and shame."

On the other side the best writing was by Witherspoon, minister of Beith. He was an able but wordy pamphleteer, who wrote ninety long pages against the stage, besides a letter covering nine. In every sense of the word Witherspoon was a militant Churchman. A lineal descendant of John Knox,

he went out in 1745 at the head of a company of militia, raised by his own efforts, "in defence of our only rightful and lawful sovereign King George." At Glasgow the little band of loyalists was dispersed by order, as the Government had not the means of furnishing them with arms. Witherspoon, instead of returning to his ministerial duties in Beith, went to the front and was present at the battle of Falkirk; there he was taken prisoner and confined for a time in the Castle of Doune. He went subsequently to America, and became President of the College of Princeton, New Jersey.

Witherspoon holds that the theatre is forbidden to a Christian. Yet he understands the other side of the question, and even states it quite fairly. "Comedy is exposing the folly of vice. Is not this commendable? Is not ridicule a noble means of discountenancing vice? And is not the use of it warranted by the satire and irony that is to be found in the holy scriptures? Tragedy is promoting the same end in a way more grave and solemn. It is a moral lecture or a moral picture in which virtue appears to great advantage. What is history itself but representing the characters of men as they actually were? and plays represent them as they may be. In their perfection plays are as like history and nature as the poet's art and actor's skill can make them. Is it, then, the circumstance of their being written in dialogue that renders them criminal? Who will pretend that? Is it that they are publicly repeated or acted over? Will any one pretend that it is a crime to personate a character in any case even where no deceit is intended? Then farewell parables,

figures of speech, and the whole oratorical art. Is it a sin to look upon the representation? Then it must be a sin to look upon the world, which is the original of which plays are the copy." "I believe it is very possible," he adds, "to write a treatise in the form of a dialogue in which the general rules of the drama are observed, which shall be as holy and serious as any sermon that ever was preached or printed. Neither is there any apparent impossibility in getting different persons to assume the different characters and rehearse it in society. But," and now for his attack, "it may be safely affirmed that if all plays were of that kind, and human nature continue in its present state, the doors of the playhouse would shut of their own accord, because no one would demand access unless there were an act of parliament to force attendance; and even in that case as much pains would probably be taken to evade the law obliging to attend as are now taken to evade those that command us to abstain. The fair and plain state of this question then is, Whether it is possible or practicable in the present state of human nature to have the above system of things under so good a regulation as to make the erecting and countenancing the stage agreeable to the will of God, and consistent with the purity of the Christian profession?" Witherspoon sums up his indictment against the theatre in three propositions—(1) that the stage is an improper amusement; (2) that instead of being a proper method of instruction, it is hurtful and pernicious; (3) that none can attend the theatre without partaking of the sins of others and contributing to their injury.

Carlyle wrote (and published anonymously) a highly diverting booklet, entitled "An argument to prove that the Tragedy of Douglas ought to be publickly burnt by the hands of the Hangman." "The zeal and violence of the Presbytery of Edinburgh," he confessed afterwards,[1] "who had made enactments and declarations to be read in the pulpit, provoked me to write this pamphlet, which, in the ironical manner of Swift, contained a severe satire on all our opponents." Sincerely regarding the squabble as much ado about nothing, he turns the whole hubbub into delightful ridicule. "Joseph Addison, Esq.," he begins, "was certainly drunk when he laid it down as a maxim in one of his *Spectators*, that a perfect tragedy is the noblest production of human nature." In the remainder of his satire he elaborates five reasons why the play should be "burnt by the hands of the hangman." (1) There is hardly a single word true from beginning to end! (2) It is reported to be a singularly good tragedy. (3) The author is a clergyman, learned, eloquent, and witty, so much so that his company has been very much sought after by persons of superior station. Worst of all, he is a *young* clergyman. (4) The tragedy is said by some to be an honour to our country. (5) It has given great offence to the nobility and gentry of Scotland. "Is it not the height of folly and presumption for this rash young man to step in before his betters, and take upon him, forsooth, to raise the reputation of his country higher than ever it was before for fine writing, which is the first and most excellent of the fine arts?" Of the Presbytery of

[1] *Autobiography*, p. 313.

Edinburgh he says : "They have winked for many years at the diversions of the theatre, and permitted the most virtuous matrons and tender virgins to repair to that shop of iniquity unreproved, reserving the fire of their zeal till it should be blown up by motives purely ecclesiastical. They have long been the leading presbytery in the Church, and after this master-stroke of ingenuous zeal I soon hope to see them dictate to every other presbytery in Scotland. For observe their admirable conduct : they scorned to attack the stage on its weak side of comedy, or even on that of exceptionable tragedies ; but have waited many years with the utmost coolness and patience till a tragedy appeared with which every mortal was highly delighted, and which the best judges pronounced to be one of the most moral poems that ever was composed." He then concludes : "Next Wednesday, then, let it be publickly burnt by the hands of the hangman, and I shall exceeding rejoice that I have been instrumental (though unworthy) to save my country from ruin, and prevent the downfall of true religion."

Carlyle also issued "A full and true History of the Bloody Tragedy of *Douglas* as it is now to be seen acting in the Theatre at the Canongate." This he wrote in one day, and it was cried through the streets on the next. It is a plain matter of fact narrative, printed on a single sheet, and intended for the lower orders to waken up their interest in the play.

The boldness of the half-dozen country parsons who, with Carlyle at their head, defied the conventionalities of their cloth and elbowed and jostled

their way into the Canongate theatre, is the subject of several amusing street-ballads of the time. Specially witty is one entitled "A first night's Audience," which tells how

> "Hid close in the green-room some clergymen lay,
> Good actors themselves, too, their whole life a play:
> C—lyle with a cudgel and genius rare,
> With aspect as stern as a Hessian hussar:
> Derry down, down, down, Derry down."

It need not surprise us that in the middle of the eighteenth century the efforts of those who sought to encourage the practice of histrionic art should be met by their ecclesiastical brethren with determined resistance. Twenty years earlier, Allan Ramsay, nothing daunted by the bigoted opposition to his scheme of a circulating library, set about erecting a playhouse for the entertainment of his fellow-citizens. He addressed them in the lines:

> "Shall London have its houses twa,
> And we be doomed to nane ava?
> Is our metropolis, ance the place
> When lang-syne dwelt the royal race
> Of Fergus, this gait dwindled doon
> To the level o' a *clachàn* toun?
> While thus she suffers the desertion
> Of a maist rational diversion."

Ramsay's playhouse was in Carrubber's Close, and an advertisement in the *Caledonian Mercury* announced that it had been built regardless of expense in order that, during the winter nights, "the citizens might enjoy themselves in hearing, performed by competent actors, dramas that would amuse, instruct, and elevate." This was in 1736. The following year a

statute was passed by Parliament for the regulation of theatres. It enacted that no performance of stage plays was lawful outside of London save when the King chanced to be residing in some other town. The effect of this statute on Ramsay's venture was that it well-nigh involved it in ruin. In a poetical epistle he appealed to Lord President Duncan Forbes:

> "Is there aught better than the stage
> To mend the follies o' the age,
> If managed as it ought to be,
> Fra ilka vice and blaidry free?
> Wherefore, my Lords, I humbly pray
> Our lads may be allowed to play,
> At least till new-house debts be paid off,
> The cause that I'm the maist afraid of:
> Which lade lyes on my single back,
> And I maun pay it ilka plack."

How he and his playhouse successors evaded the enactment was to name the theatre a *Concert Hall*, and render the performance of the play *gratis*.

However we may regard the conduct of Carlyle and the other clergymen who countenanced the acting of Home's tragedy, it was clearly made too much of by the party of orthodoxy, as the decision of the supreme court of the Church practically admitted. At the same time, few of their brethren wholly approved of it. Many, on the other hand, admired Principal Robertson at this time. He publicly and privately exerted himself to shield his friends from the punishment which threatened them; and, as Dugald Stewart in his account of his life remarks, his arguments had all the greater weight from the fact that he himself had never been in the inside of a theatre,—"a remarkable proof,

among numberless others which the history of his life affords, of that scrupulous circumspection in his private conduct which, while it added so much to his usefulness as a clergyman, was essential to his influence as the leader of a party, and which so often enabled him to recommend successfully to others the same candid and indulgent spirit that was congenial to his own mind."

Whether we are to interpret it as a decline in *circumspection* or an advance in refinement, by 1785 we find the General Assembly adjourning its evening sederunts so as to allow members the opportunity of hearing Mrs. Siddons. On her first visit to Edinburgh the year before, the celebrated actress appeared in *Douglas* several nights. People travelled all the way from Newcastle to see her; and such was the rage excited by her peerless acting, that on one of the days of her 1785 visit to the Scottish metropolis as many as 2557 applications were made for 630 places.

There have always been people who have anathematised the theatre as well as those who have supported it; and the latter, when put on their defence, have usually contended that if religious people would only visit it more they would help to reform it, and make it a school of virtue and morals. The religious people in reply have commonly given the answer Witherspoon gave, that a *reformed* theatre would soon have to close its doors. "As soon as the playhouse shall be thoroughly *reformed* it will be as ill attended as the Edinburgh week-day sermon."[1] The attitude of serious people towards playgoing, something half-

[1] *Scotland and Scotsmen*, ii. 547.

way between disapproval and indifference, need not always be put down to bigotry and sour Puritanism. Even Plato disapproved of the theatre, and of all poetry that went beyond hymns to the gods and the praises of famous men. In his *Republic* he would not allow the profession of the actor. "We should not," he said, "depict or be able to imitate any kind of illiberality or other baseness, lest from imitation we come to be what we imitate."[1] In Home and Carlyle's days, what embittered some in their dislike of play-acting was the conviction that the taste for it was one of those frivolous and objectionable things for which the Union was responsible. Till the year 1715 there had been no theatrical entertainments in Edinburgh from the time that the Duke of York held his Court at the Abbey. Now, under the influence of "the predominating partner," Scotland seemed to be losing its head. What a writer says about the religious state of the country in 1761 must have been pretty near the truth:[2] "Within the bosom of the Church there appeared a conformity to the world and a reckless disregard of the official decencies of life which threatened the interests of vital godliness even among those who ought to have supported it. The easy, social, and gentlemanly manners of the clergy of the Church of England after the Union were aped and copied by the leading Moderates of the Church of Scotland. Instead of the Sectarian sourness of the covenanting period, they verged to an opposite extreme of softness and complacency, chiming in with the literature and amusements of the age. The strong points of

[1] Book III. [2] Struthers' *History of the Relief Church*, p. 167.

Calvinistic theology were thrown into the shade, and the moral virtues were decked out in their sentimental discourses with every possible finery of language. The Cross of Christ was merely referred to in the way of distant allusion. In signing the Confession of Faith, some did not scruple to acknowledge it contained all their belief and a great deal more."

At an early period of the controversy, Home had resigned his charge and settled in London to a life of literary labours. From all accounts he was a most likeable man. He, too, had been one of the fighting parsons at the battle of Falkirk, and shared the same fate as Witherspoon. Henry Mackenzie gives two evidences of his popularity as a parish minister. First, when he left Athelstaneford and preached his farewell discourse there was not a dry eye in the audience. Second, when, years afterwards, he came back from London to retire from public life, and built a house in East Lothian near his former home, his old parishioners led all the stones for the building, and would not accept payment from him. Although the intimate friend of Lord Bute, "he never asked (and, Mackenzie says, I cannot mention it without feeling equal surprise and displeasure) he was never offered any office or appointment, so many of which Lord Bute had in his power to bestow." Like Oliver Goldsmith, who could not beg for himself but could do it for others, Home more than once recommended others to favourable situations. It is said, however, that Bute gave him a Government pension.

A specimen of Home's wit—almost the only one extant—may close our study of the *Douglas* controversy.

It happened that a young man, bearing hitherto a good character, absconded with a considerable sum of money belonging to his employer. The incident came up in conversation at a dinner party at which John Home and his namesake David Hume were present. The latter declared it a moral problem which entirely baffled him, how a person of high character could do such a thing and bring ruin upon himself. "I can easily account for it," said Home, "from the nature of his studies and the kind of books he was in the habit of reading." "What were they?" asked the philosopher. "Boston's *Fourfold State*," rejoined the poet, "and Hume's *Essays*." [1]

[1] Mackenzie's *Life of John Home*, p. 22.

CHAPTER V

AN AYRSHIRE "NEW LIGHT."

AUTHORITIES

A Practical Essay on the Death of Jesus Christ. By W. M'Gill, D.D. Edin. 1786.
The Burgher Associate Synod's *Warning against Socinianism.*
Works of Robert Burns. Wallace's edition. Edin. 1896.
M'Kerrow's *History of the Secession Church.* Edin. 1839.
Struthers' *History of the Relief Church.* Glasg. 1843.

THERE is no better sign of the times, or one deserving of more credit, than an honest attempt to render practical and intelligible the difficult dogmas of religion. It is true those who become mediators between Reason and Revelation not infrequently bring disaster on themselves, and earn the unenviable distinction of being disturbers of the Church's peace. The faults of rashness and imprudence may, as a rule, be safely enough laid at the door of such men; but they are usually persons characterised by a considerable measure of ability, spirituality, and seriousness of mind. Dr. M'Gill of Ayr was a case in point. When he published, in 1786, *A Practical Essay on the Death of Jesus Christ*, he was certainly animated with the laudable desire of calling the attention of the Church to those practical aspects of the Atonement on which all are agreed, and which

tend to promote godliness of life. His effort, indeed, came far short of a full and worthy account of the profound theme, but it showed him to be all that the poet Burns, who was a particular friend of his, declared in characteristic vigour concerning him, that he was "one of the worthiest as well as one of the ablest of the whole priesthood of the Kirk of Scotland in every sense of that ambiguous term."[1]

But, like many men who from the best intentions have set themselves to explain the Atonement, M'Gill came very near explaining it entirely away. His anxiety to bring it down to the level of everyday life, so as to commend it to the acceptance of men of reason and common sense, led him to describe it after the fashion of Arian and Socinian notions, and to empty it of all precious content. His explanations are partly an anticipation of the teaching of F. D. Maurice and partly Socinianism pure and simple. He attributes to the Atonement no objective character as a satisfaction rendered to Divine Justice. Its value is purely subjective, a part of Christ's message to sinners; and the Priesthood of Christ is not associated with His Death, but is an office to which He rises in reward for His life and death of obedience. The object of Christ's coming into the world was not to die for sinners. His death was but an incident in the career of our Lord. "The direct and immediate end of His mission," he says, "was to preach the gospel of the Kingdom or reveal the Will of God; to confirm His doctrine by proper evidences; to set an example of what He taught; and, in short, to promote the salvation of

[1] Letter to Graham of Fintry.

sinners in the most effectual manner, whatever sufferings the doing so might bring upon Him, and though it should cost Him His life."[1] "Next to the mercy of God, which is never to be forgotten, the benefits of our redemption by Christ flow chiefly from the holiness and righteousness of His life; and particularly from the eminent patience, piety, submission, and benevolence displayed at the close of it, which avail with God, in favour of sinners, in the same manner as do the piety and virtue of good men in general: only the effects of such singular excellencies are proportionably greater and more extensive."[2] Rightly enough he held that sinful men have often received very valuable benefits, which they had no title to on their own account, not only through the instrumentality but on account of the virtue of others; that God makes even the imperfect virtue which is to be found among men a source of blessedness, not to its immediate owners only, but to others also who are estranged from it. The happiness of its votaries He increases, by suffering their piety to overflow, to the good of all with whom they are connected, or for whom they interest themselves. He is pleased to accept of it at their hands, both on their own behalf and in some sort, too, as the price of benefits bestowed upon the undeserving."[3] The error in such statements was not, as some at the time mistakenly declared, that they countenanced the Popish doctrine of supererogation; it lay in the insinuation which they contained, that the vicarious sufferings of the Son of God were on a par with human vicariousness. Human vicariousness is a fact which in such examples as

[1] *A Practical Essay*, p. 245. [2] *Ibid.* p. 275. [3] *Ibid.* p. 269.

Abraham and David receives ample recognition in Scripture. But while it may serve as a good illustration of the efficacy of Christ's death for sinners, it would be an error to hold it as identical with that, the error into which M'Gill apparently fell.

M'Gill's honest but mistaken efforts to construe the Atonement in practical and intelligible terms brought down upon him the mild censure of the Church. A Committee consisting of fifteen clergy and ten elders were entrusted by the inferior court to consider and report upon his views. It is said that among the latter was included Fisher, the original of Burns' "Holy Willie." The Committee found the Doctor guilty of erroneous teaching on these important matters: the original and essential dignity of the Son of God; the doctrine of Atonement by His sufferings and death; the method of reconciling sinners to God; and subscription to the Confession of Faith.

How he fell foul of the Confession of Faith must be told. It seems that M'Gill had remained silent under all the censures of the orthodox party for upwards of a year after the publication of his unfortunate volume. But when one who was a near neighbour, and up till that time a friend, denounced the essay as heretical and the author of it a person who "with one hand received the privileges of the Church while with the other he was endeavouring to plunge the keenest poniard into her breast," he could no longer keep silence. "There was a period of the Christian Church," he said in defence, "when they were thought worthy of censure who would not consent to wholesome words, even the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. But now we are liable

to very severe censure if we do not set aside these wholesome divine words and substitute in their room the commandments of men ; yea, submit to the dictates of every reverend upstart creed-maker who has presumption not only to impose on us his own sense of the Scripture and of the Confession of Faith, but to set up their unscriptural phrases as the objects of our reverence and worship." It was this sneer at Creeds and Confessions that did M'Gill most injury. But for it, his lucubrations on the Atonement might have been allowed to pass. At the worst they would have been characterised as the ravings of a man "who had travelled beyond his depth, and who was dealing with matters too high for his comprehension." But when the venerable Confession of Faith was brought into contempt, it was a different matter. The clergy looked upon their craft as in danger, and the cry arose, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

Dr. M'Gill, however, was not an obstinate fighter. From all accounts he was a person of singularly amiable disposition. On that point all are agreed. Even those who were hardest on his views spoke well of the man. Being a man of peaceable nature, we are not surprised to hear that when his errors were pointed out, and he saw how they had wounded the hearts of good men, he at once retracted them, and expressed regret. He regretted that what was honestly meant to serve the interests of religion should have had the opposite effect, and have offended brethren whom he respected. He never intended his essay to be taken as a theological treatise, but merely a practical exposition. His sole design in publishing it had been to

promote the life of godliness in the souls of his readers; and apparently so absorbed had he been in his purpose, so intent on carrying out his design, that he may have omitted things which he held to be true, because the practical use of them did not appear. "In every work of man, more especially of some length and variety, it is not to be expected but there will be failures and blemishes which may have crept into it: at which, however, men of judgment and candour will not be offended when they are convinced that the design upon the whole is good." As upon further reflection he found in his writings ideas that were evidently though not intentionally erroneous, and references to divine things that were unguarded and ambiguous, he publicly disclaimed them, and expressed regret for having employed such expressions, and anew declared his belief in the original and essential dignity of the Son of God, the doctrine of Atonement by His sufferings and death, the Priesthood and Intercession of Christ, the method of reconciling sinners to God, and subscription to the Confession of Faith.

This manly recantation was made in 1790, four years after the publication of the offending volume. It brought great relief to the minds of disturbed ecclesiastics. "Impressed," said they, "with a deep sense of that harmony and concord with which this matter has been settled, and convinced that what they have done will, under the blessing of God, tend to promote peace and truth in this Church," they proceeded to thank the Lord for the countenance and direction He had given them in the matter. A section throughout the country at large regarded the ecclesiastics as thankful for very

small mercies, and they continued to keep up an agitation against the "heretic" who had been so easily dealt with; but the agitation gradually subsided after another abortive attempt had been made to libel M'Gill. The Burgher Associate Synod joined in the feeling of dissatisfaction which for a time lingered among a remnant of the National Church, and, true to their reputation for rigid orthodoxy, published about this time "a Warning against Socinianism," in which they inveighed against the bold doctrines of Dr. M'Gill and his New Light friends. The Seceders lectured their people against these doctrines, warned them against them, and condemned the judicial unfaithfulness of the Church courts.

The other side in this controversy has received immortal treatment in the writings of the poet Burns. He, as we have seen, enjoyed the friendship of Dr. M'Gill, and once and again in his published correspondence speaks respectfully about him. His own religious beliefs were much influenced by M'Gill's teaching. We can trace this influence upon the poet's thinking, not only in poems like "Holy Willie's Prayer" and "The Kirk's Alarm," but in a passage from one of his letters to Clarinda, in which he gives a full and direct statement of his religious creed. After declaring himself deeply interested in her good opinion, he proceeds to lay before her the outlines of his belief. "He who is our Author and Preserver," he says, "and will one day be our Judge, must be—not for His sake, in the way of duty, but from the native impulse of our hearts—the object of our reverential awe and grateful adoration. He is almighty

and all-bounteous; we are weak and dependent; hence prayer and every other sort of devotion. 'He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to everlasting life'; consequently it must be in every one's power to embrace His offer of 'everlasting life': otherwise He could not in justice condemn those who did not. A mind pervaded, actuated, and governed by purity, truth, and charity, though it does not *merit* heaven, yet is an absolutely necessary prerequisite, without which heaven can neither be obtained or enjoyed; and by Divine promise, such a mind shall never fail of attaining 'everlasting life'; hence the impure, the deceiving, and the uncharitable exclude themselves from eternal bliss by their unfitness for enjoying it. The Supreme Being has put the immediate administration of all this—for wise and good ends known to Himself—into the hands of Jesus Christ, a great Personage, whose relation to Him we cannot comprehend, but whose relation to us is [that of] a Guide and Saviour; and who, except for our own obstinacy and misconduct, will bring us all, through various ways and by various means, to bliss at last.

"These are my tenets, my lovely friend; and which I think cannot be well disputed. My creed is pretty nearly expressed in the last clause of Jamie Dean's grace, an honest weaver in Ayrshire: 'Lord, grant that we may lead a gude life! for a gude life maks a gude end; at least it helps weel!'"[1] Earlier, in a letter to Mrs. Dunlop, the poet had expressed himself ready to draw his sword in defence of the Ayrshire "heretic." "I ever could ill endure," he tells her,

[1] "Letter to Clarinda," Jan. 8, 1788.

"those surly cubs of 'chaos and old night'—those ghostly beasts of prey who foul the hallowed ground of Religion with their nocturnal prowlings; but if the prosecution which I hear the Erebean fanatics are projecting against my learned and truly worthy friend, Dr. M'Gill, goes on, I shall keep no measure with the savages, but fly at them with the *faucons* of Ridicule, or run them down with the bloodhounds of Satire, as lawful game, wherever I start them."[1] His ballad, "The Kirk's Alarm," with the two opening stanzas of which we conclude this chapter, was the poet's tribute to his friend Dr. M'Gill, and an expression of sympathy for his views. The vigour and severity with which in this ballad the poet lashes M'Gill's persecutors, shows the keen interest which Burns took, as became a Scot, in the religious controversies of his country.

"Orthodox, Orthodox, who believe in John Knox,
Let me sound an alarm to your conscience:
There's a heretic blast been blawn i' the west,
That 'what is not sense must be nonsense,'
Orthodox! That 'what is not sense must be nonsense.'

Doctor Mac, Doctor Mac, ye should stretch on a rack,
To strike evil-doers wi' terror;
To join Faith and Sense, upon any pretence,
Was heretic, damnable error,
Doctor Mac! 'Twas heretic, damnable error."

[1] "Letter to Mrs. Dunlop," Nov. 4, 1787.

CHAPTER VI

THE APOCRYPHA CONTROVERSY

AUTHORITIES

The Edinburgh Christian Instructor, 1825–26–27–29.
Hanna's *Life of Chalmers*. Edin. 1849–52.
Oliphant's *Life of Edward Irving*. Lond. 1862.
Pamphlets of the time.
The Eclectic Review of the time.
Streane's *The Age of the Maccabees*. Lond. 1892.
The Apocrypha. (S.P.C.K. 1889.)
Articles on *The Apocrypha* in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, and the *Encyclopædia Biblica*.

THE early years of the nineteenth century witnessed a dissemination of the Scriptures on the most marvellous scale. By 1827 the British and Foreign Bible Society could boast that they had issued the Word of God in no fewer than one hundred and forty-three different languages. The energy and enterprise with which the work at all times was conducted was something amazing. Even in 1826, the year of the short corn, when famine and commercial distress threatened to produce a collapse in all kinds of philanthropic effort, the Bible Society went on with its work with a stability that nothing could disturb. All that needed to be said was, "In this season of peculiar distress to the poor, we think the rich have a loud call to double

the amount of their ordinary subscriptions." Scotland contributed a considerable share to the work of Bible propagation. It was said, but perhaps unwarrantably, that in the room in which David Hume died, the Bible Society of Scotland was afterwards constituted, and held its first meeting.[1] The myth, if it be such, embodied a sense of satisfaction and even triumph in connection with the Society's work which in the circumstances was both natural and pardonable. Dr. Chalmers, in the early years of his great career, made the establishment of local branches of the Society one of his hobbies, supported them by the weekly pence of the subscribers, and by this means educated the people of Scotland to believe in the power of littles, and to maintain a great Church by voluntary aid. It was, however, the fate of this prosperous organisation to pass through an acute crisis in its history, known as the Apocrypha Controversy,—a controversy which lasted long, and was conducted with unparalleled bitterness, resulting, moreover, in the most trifling and insignificant benefits to the Christian world.

Those who would follow this controversy have to remember what the one party in the strife was for ever dunning into the ears of the other, that the British and Foreign Bible Society was started in a Protestant country by Protestants, for printing and circulating the Holy Scriptures *without note and comment*. It was never the intention of the promoters to include the Apocrypha. In 1815 an order appeared in the minutes of the Society excluding all non-

[1] See *Old and New Edinburgh*, ii. 160.

canonical writings. The necessity for this arose from the fact that, two years earlier, liberty was granted to some foreign Societies to publish at the British Society's expense Bibles containing the Apocrypha, but *without note or comment*. The permission to do this had been given under the impression that the Word of God would find entrance into communities where it was most desirable to carry it, but where, without the inclusion of the Apocrypha, it would be vain to attempt to introduce it. These were the Greek Church, Roman Catholic communities where the Apocrypha was revered and sanctioned by the Council of Trent, Lutheran communities where the decree of Trent was not accepted, but where the Apocrypha was revered and allowed a secondary degree of inspiration and authority, and certain Reformed Churches of the Continent, where the Apocrypha was regarded, as it is in the Church of England, as useful for edification.

This apparently harmless proposal was received throughout the country, especially in Scotland, with a perfect hurricane of opposition. Let the Society, it was said, supply the New Testament pure and simple in such places, or let them prosecute their labours of Bible propagation in other neglected fields of operation where the Society could carry on its work on its own constitutional lines. It was held to be intolerable that a Society like the British and Foreign, with an irreproachable record, should now sink to the level of doing evil that good might come. It was also asked where this principle of accommodation would stop. Why not print an expurgated New Testament for Unitarians, or a Bible

with the Book of Enoch included for the Abyssinian Church? Why not bind the Liturgy with the Bible for the convenience of the English Church, and the Westminster Confession for the Scottish people? Finally, it seemed to the anti-Apocryphalists that in granting the liberty referred to, the Society was playing into the hands of continental rationalism. The Society was charged with "putting a most fearful fraud upon the world, and laying a deadly snare for the souls of men." The Apocrypha was held up as not only uninspired, but even inferior to many writings that laid no claim to inspiration; it was "abundantly interspersed with falsehoods, false doctrines, superstitions, and contradictions of itself and of the Word of God," yet advancing "a deceitful claim to reverence and attention." The Society was denounced for having "gone out of its direct and legitimate course to give its sanction to a human composition replete with error which wickedly assumes to be a revelation from heaven." Whereas it undertook the circulation of the pure Word of God, and received the money of the public for this purpose and no other; it was charged with having used the funds entrusted to it fraudulently, and even to be forcing the Apocrypha on many who were willing to take the Bible without it. In many quarters the resolution was accordingly come to, to stop the supply of funds until the Society should repent of its conduct,—conduct that

"Made angels weep and devils triumph."

"What would we say," asked the indignant controversialists, "of the conduct of a jury who would bring

in a verdict of not guilty when it had been fully proved that the panel at the bar had poisoned the bread he had made and sold, by witholding a portion of good flour from the leaven and supplying the place thereof with a substance quite deleterious and hurtful? Would the judges discharge him *simpliciter* without a single remark? What would the law as it stands inflict on the physician who, because his patients would not take medicine unless poison was mixed up with it, should hearken to their demands and comply with their requests, when he was well aware it was contrary to law, and that the consequences would be death?"

The Apocryphalists met their objections with a rejoinder framed in the spirit of *Nathan the Wise*. They said, "Supposing there were found Mahomedans so candid to our opinions as to accept our Scriptures and unite with us in the establishing of a Bible Society at Mecca or Damascus, agreeing to respect the integrity of our Scriptures but without pledging themselves never to circulate their own Koran, should we decline such association, and advise them to fling the volume they had been used to venerate from infancy into the flames or the Euphrates if ever they hoped to benefit by the perusal of the Word of God? Would this be the way to disarm opposition and conciliate confidence? Would they not more readily imbibe the impression of our being fair men, whose strength lay in the goodness of our cause, by our thus accosting them— ; 'That is your book and this is ours ; each professes a divine origin and authority which both cannot possess : bestow on each a faithful and strenuous examination, as the welfare of your souls is involved in the result ; let

nothing that concerns their internal merit or external evidence pass unexplored; and if after that the Koran still retain in your eyes the majesty of truth and the Bible confirm itself to your conviction as a cunningly devised fable, we shall hold you acquitted in continuing invincible Mussulmans.'"

One of the few Scotsmen who were Apocryphalists was M'Gavin, editor of the *Protestant*, who went as far as to say, "I wish all the world had the Bible even with the Apocrypha beside it, nay even with Tom Paine beside it. I would trust God's Word in presence of its greatest enemy, and feel no anxiety about the consequence." Those hostile to the mixed Scriptures were unable to abide these views. Even at home, among people able to discriminate between canonical and non-canonical books, they would not trust a mixed copy of the Bible; much less among the ignorant Papistry who could not make the necessary distinction, and who would only too greedily take the falsehoods of men for the truth of God, especially as the mixed Bible came from a Society that professed to handle the pure Word of God.

The Edinburgh Committee by advocating these views were accused of dictating in a high-handed way to foreign Societies, but with genuine Caledonian pride they told the Southroner that while the foreign Societies were the recipients, they were the donors, and it was not the part of the former to coerce the conscience of the latter. "We neither," said they, "force anything on them nor take anything from them. We only withhold what we believe to involve error in itself and sin in the communication, and offer what we believe to be the volume of inspiration and the only

thing that we can safely or innocently impart." "What about the Scottish paraphrases?" retorted the other side. "Would any one call it sinful to bind them together with the Holy Scriptures? And yet why not?" "Whoever heard such stark nonsense?" was the reply. "The paraphrases have not the least appearance of forming a part of the divine record, or have ever been declared by any Church or Council to possess that character."

The Edinburgh party carried their demands. "Who is to watch over the purity of the Sacred Word," asks one of their notable men, "if it is not a Society professedly formed for the purpose of giving more extensive circulation to the *Holy Scriptures without note or comment?* Have not they been constituted in some sense the public guardians of the Word of God: and in point of fact have they not been daily in the habit of claiming the support of the Christian world for their successful efforts in diffusing 'the pure truth without any intermixture of error'? And have we not been told times without number that to the rigid maintenance of this grand principle is to be mainly ascribed the high measure of prosperity which the Institution has attained? If the Bible Society is to be held as under no obligation to adhere to a pure Canon and to act rigidly on its own avowed resolutions, and if it is to give its countenance and aid to anything or to everything which its agents may palm upon it under the guise of sacredness; and if all inquiry on such matters is precluded by the very comprehensiveness and liberality of its constitution, then I say that the Bible Society runs the imminent hazard of becoming

one of the greatest curses that ever visited our globe."[1]

The battle raged fiercely for a considerable time. Among the finer spirits in the fray was that honourable Scotsman, Robert Haldane, who is said to have composed fifteen pamphlets, so great was his anxiety to suppress "that dreadful abomination the Apocrypha." An equally fair and honourable man on the other side was Dr. Wardlaw, who wrote some pithy doggerel which he entitled "Hints on Controversy," hitting off the controversial manners of the time:

"Be sure that the object for which you contend
Is worth all the time and the labour you spend;
Since gifts are for profit and life's but a span,
To waste them becomes not accountable man.

O shun the dogmatical airs of conceit!
Forget not how little the wisest can know,
In the twilight of heavenly science below:
The high *ipse-dixit*, infallible tone
Is the right of the Pope and his Council alone.

When you quote an opponent, be candid and fair,
'Tis needful the more that the virtue's so rare;
Disjoint not his periods to answer your end,
Nor a word nor a syllable alter or bend.
I always suspect—*latet anguis in herba*,
When a man does not quote my *ipsissima verba*."

The protagonist of this controversy was undoubtedly Dr. Andrew Thomson, "a gladiator of the intellect," as Edward Irving called him. He had a giant's strength, but used it like a giant, as the pages of the

[1] Dr. Burns (see *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* for 1827, p. 220).

Edinburgh Christian Instructor show ; but he was, taking him all in all, among the greatest of his countrymen.

The picturesque figure in the drama was, of course, Edward Irving, who is found on the anti-Apocryphal side. A contemporary chronicle supplies a graphic picture of Irving at one of the noisy meetings then so common. "The Rev. Edward Irving stood forward, but was assailed from the platform and side seats with yells and hissing of the most outrageous description. Mr. Irving, however, stood his ground manfully, and with a look of mingled scorn and indignation raised his voice above the clamour, and, addressing the side seats, exclaimed, 'What, do you know the spirit in which I mean to speak that you thus dare to put me down?' The cry became very general now to hear him from the body of the meeting, but such was the hooting and noise from the platform and side seats that it was doubtful whether it would not have been necessary to adjourn the meeting or call in peace officers. At length Lord Mandeville came forward and demanded a hearing for Mr. Irving, and several of his other friends also came forward to support him. Silence having been partially restored, Mr. Irving said that he had left his sickbed for the purpose of performing what he conceived to be a sacred duty not only to the Church, but to the great Head of the Church. That duty he would perform fearlessly but in the spirit of meekness. (Here great clamour and hooting was again excited by certain individuals in the left side seats about the centre of the room.) 'Ay!' continued Mr. Irving 'this duty I will perform although I should be hooted and hissed from this room ; yes, and if you will even thrust me by

violence out of this room.' (Here the reverend gentleman was loudly cheered, and repeatedly during his speech the yells of those who had come to put down all opposition to the Committee were drowned by the cries of *Hear him*, *Hear him.*) 'He attended that meeting as a peacemaker, and not with the view of interrupting the business of the day. He had been entrusted with several remonstrances from various Societies in his native land against the proceeding of the officers of the Society; but these he had laid before the Committee rather than by means of them attempt to do anything hostile to the Society at this meeting. The first recommendation was that the Committee should record their regret for having unwittingly and unwarily, or any other way they choose to word it, aided in the pernicious practice of circulating the fables of man, that is to say, the Apocrypha, intermingled with and as an integral part of the Word of God. What Protestant,' said the reverend gentleman, 'be he member of the Church of England or Scotland, can refuse to express his regret for this; and without this expression of regret, how can you expect the public to believe you are sincere in your abandonment of the Apocrypha? The second recommendation is to decline aiding foreign Societies or individuals who adhered to the Apocrypha, or at least to prefer aiding Societies which did not so act. And the third, to take care in any future elections of Committee or officers of the Society not to admit any persons but those who were cordially opposed to the circulation of the Apocrypha, and who would carry into effect the anti-Apocrypha resolutions in the spirit as well as in the

letter ; for he must say that after a careful observation of the proceedings of the Committee for a whole year, he saw enough to convince him that there was such a thing as observing their resolutions in their letter without adhering to their spirit : and what indignity could there be in adopting such resolutions,—resolutions which he was authorised to say would restore almost complete harmony to the Society, and would in particular recall Scotland to its attachment : and for his beloved native land he would say this much, that her zeal in opposing the Apocrypha was not to be wondered at, when it was remembered that the Church of Scotland never had in any way admitted the Apocrypha either as the Word of God or as an adjunct to it : and her firmness need not be wondered at, when it was also remembered that rather than surrender her doctrines and forms of worship, Scotland had endured, and successfully endured, a whole century of swords and bayonets.' (Here the reverend gentleman was again interrupted by the same yells and hisses as before.) He said, 'I see it is vain to speak, for you are determined that I shall not be heard. However, I have performed my duty to my Lord Jesus Christ : let those answer to Him who have this day withstood me. And I will say this also, I have stood alone,—alone, too, not among my enemies, but my brethren ; and although my honourable friend Mr. Noel has said that it is not glorious so to do, I would remind him that Apostles and Martyrs and Confessors have often stood alone among their brethren. I would ask him if Jesus Christ Himself did not stand alone when forsaken by His disciples ; and if the Apostle Paul did not stand alone

when at Antioch he withstood both Peter and James and Barnabas?' The close of Mr. Irving's speech was delivered with great emphasis, and was on the whole loudly cheered."[1]

This controversy was characterised by nothing so much as its bitterness. How much both parties had to learn of the spirit of toleration may be seen by the language they were in the habit of employing. Speaking of a writer in the *Eclectic Review*, the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* said, "Before this advocate for corrupting the Word of God can be restored to the credit which he has lost in the esteem of every sound believer, it will be necessary for him to perform a lustration. But enough at present of this half-bred theologian and most miserable guide of public opinion."[2] Speaking of another *Eclectic Reviewer*, the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* also said, "It is more destitute of argument than its predecessors: but it overflows with the grossest scurrility that ever polluted a literary journal. The author is in a rage throughout, and his rage is so lawless that he tramples on all the decencies of civil as well as Christian life. It is a sort of lycanthropy, which Johnson defines to be a kind of madness in which men have the qualities of wild beasts; and yet there is some method in his madness, such at least as to make him justly responsible for all that he has said, notwithstanding the insanity of its general character. . . . He is like the culprits who roll themselves in the dirty kennel that their pursuers from sheer disgust may not lay hands upon them and get

[1] See *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* for 1827, p. 411.
[2] *Ibid.* for 1826, p. 313.

them put into durance vile."[1] Of another opponent, the same journal says, "He is driven from the field of argument and has had recourse to angry railing, to the vilest personalities and the most disgusting scurrilities. He asserts that our review is garnished with lies, that certain allegations in it are infamous lies. Where he was born, and bred, and brought up, and taught to speak we know not and care not; but of this one thing we are certain, that the process of early discipline through which he may have passed, and the respectable society into which, from his profession, he must have been admitted, have not yet polished him into a man of good taste and well-bred sentiment or expression in letter-writing. To such gross language his own words, the world being judges, are completely in point. It is such as none but a clergyman or a woman could hope to use with impunity. I think even a clergyman might be benefited by observing the conduct of the men of the world, and that he should scrupulously abstain from any word or insinuation for which they would demand redress by the pistol or the sword."[2]

Dr. Wardlaw protested against the controversial style in vogue. "Why are we," he said, "at every step to be taxed with 'slyness,' and 'naughty quibbling,' and 'unfairness,' and 'perversion of truth,' and 'mournful disingenuousness?' Is this Christian? Is it gentlemanly? Away with it, sir! It is in every respect unworthy of you; unworthy of your high talent and vigorous intellect as a writer, unworthy of your dignity

[1] *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* for 1826, p. 662.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 668.

as a gentleman, unworthy of your principles as a Christian. You have too long treated your opponents, in this question, as if it were either impossible to be an honest man or a man of common sense, without going all lengths with you in your hostility to the Earl Street Committee." Forgetting his own advice, Dr. Wardlaw concluded, "No more of your rotten eggs, then, Mr. Editor, till you are sure they are deserved."[1]

Although the bitterness that degraded this controversy was, as we see, most humiliating, the explanation of it was obvious enough. The anti-Apocryphalists were all keen Protestants who remembered how the Council of Trent had exalted the Apocrypha to an equality with the inspired Canon. "Learn here, every good Christian," Latimer had said, "to abhor this most detestable and dangerous poison of the Papists; learn here, I say, to leave all Papistry, and to stick only to the Word of God." "What," asked Dr. Burns, "was it that led the Council of Trent to approve of Tobit and Co.? Mosheim says because of the detriment done to Popery by the Reformers' teaching from the Bible. They decreed to prohibit the indiscriminate reading of the Bible, and that the Vulgate with its Apocryphal intermixtures was the only authentic copy of the Word of God."[2]

In addition to this anti-Papal prejudice against the Apocrypha, it was disliked on its own account. The opponents of the Apocrypha had little historical faculty, such as enables men at the present day to

[1] *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* for 1826, p. 784.
[2] *Ibid.* for 1827, p. 298.

value ancient writings irrespective of their agreement with the contents. Accordingly they denounced it because of its contradictions and absurdities, its magic and superstitions, its doctrine of the transmigration of souls, prayers for the dead, etc. etc. Because of these blemishes they saw in it nothing but what was wrong and pernicious. Had they regarded the matter from our standpoint, they would have tolerated the circulation of the Apocrypha, and perceived some important ends to be served by it. The First Book of Maccabees, for instance, helps to fill the gap between the last of the Old Testament prophets and the Advent of our Lord; surely, therefore, it becomes an important addition to the Scriptures? Then the books called Apocryphal are full of instruction regarding the preparation for the gospel in the centuries immediately prior to the Advent. The rise of the several ecclesiastical parties that are seen in our Lord's time struggling for the mastery, the phenomena of Essenism, Phariseeism, and Sadduceeism, the growing importance of the high priestly office in a worldly sense, the development of the doctrines of angels and of a future life,—these and other spiritual and social forces that are seen at work in the days of Christ and the Apostles can be studied in the Apocrypha by the student of the Gospels as nowhere else. Valuable apologetic service, too, might have been rendered by having the canonical and the non-canonical elements placed side by side. The difference of tone in the two sets of writings, the artificiality of the one compared with the heavenly simplicity of the other, would have given the inspired writings an air of authority and conduced to their

acceptance as the Word of God. A story of the statesman Pitt well illustrates how the difference between the two appealed to the ordinary reader of Scripture. Pitt was in the habit of studying the Bible, and knew it well. It happened, then, that a bishop was reading to him in manuscript an exposition of the Creed in the course of which there were several quotations from Scripture. Then came a quotation which the great statesman interrupted. "I do not recollect that passage in the Bible," he said, "it does not sound like Scripture." It was a quotation from the Apocrypha.

Apocryphal prejudice lasted a whole generation after the controversy was dead. When Queen Victoria placed an inscription on the monument of Prince Albert at Balmoral, she derived it from an Apocryphal Book—"He being made perfect in a short time fulfilled a long time: for his soul pleased the Lord: therefore hasted He to take him away from among the wicked." The innocent act drew a censure from Dr. Andrew Thomson's successor. He declared it to be "the deed of the Broad Church clergy whom Her Majesty brought about her."[1]

[1] *Memorials of Macleod Campbell*, ii. 50.

CHAPTER VII

EDWARD IRVING

AUTHORITIES

Mrs. Oliphant's *Life*, i., ii. Lond. 1862.
The Collected Writings of Edward Irving. Lond. 1864.
The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature. By Edward Irving. Lond. 1830.
Thomas Carlyle's *Reminiscences.* Lond. 1881.
Life of Story of Rosneath by his Son (Principal Story). Camb. 1862.
Hanna's *Life of Chalmers.* Edin. 1849–52.
The Edinburgh Christian Instructor, 1830–1831–1832.
The Expositor, October 1887.
The National Review, vol. xv. Lond. 1862.
Regent Square. By John Hair. Lond. 1898.
Cunningham's *Church History*, ii. Lond. 1859.

EDWARD IRVING is one of that illustrious company who in the early part of the nineteenth century awoke their countrymen from religious slumber and indifference. His co-workers included Thomas Chalmers, John Macleod Campbell, Erskine of Linlathen, Thomas Carlyle, and pre-eminently the pioneers of the Tractarian Movement. These men, following such diversive paths, were all baptized into the same spirit, and had all one common end in view. Whether they thought to attain it, like the Tractarians, by a revival of patristic ideals ; or, as Campbell of Row and the Seer of Linlathen did, by a return to more

inward spiritual views of Christianity ; or, like Chalmers and his Non-Intrusion party, by the setting up of a Church for the people and by them,—all appeared bent on the same noble object, the rescue of their fellow-men from religious formality and carelessness.

In this harvest field Edward Irving took his place. As a youth he had cherished the ambition of creating a higher type of Christianity than any commonly met with, and in order to its accomplishment looked not to the ordinary methods of evangelism then in vogue, but to the inauguration of a new dispensation direct from heaven. The youth was father of the man. After he went to London, but before he became a pulpit celebrity, he conceived the wish specially to address himself to the cultured scientific class, largely found in the metropolis, who influence others mightily but are not themselves easily laid hold of by the Church. Speaking of the work of his brother clergymen, we find him saying, "They prepare for teaching gipsies, for teaching bargemen, for teaching miners, by apprehending their way of conceiving and estimating truth ; and why not prepare for teaching imaginative men and political men and scientific men who bear the world in hand?"[1]

How he devoted his genius to this unique task, and with what brilliant though brief success, forms a romantic story. Nor was he ambitious to influence the class in question only from the pulpit. He entered their circles of social intercourse, made himself acquainted with the leading celebrities of the day, and even attained to terms of warm intimacy with the best

[1] Oliphant's *Life*, i. 167.

of them. Coleridge, Carlyle, and Sir David Wilkie met the young pulpit orator in their rooms; and on them he made considerable impression. He did the same on those whom he knew less intimately. Sir Walter Scott once dined with him, and confessed he could not keep his eyes off the preacher all the time. Charles Lamb claimed acquaintance with him, and told his friend Leigh Hunt, that although "a Boanerges in the temple," in a room he is "a most amiable, sincere, and modest man." All the while he bore himself in the presence of the best with the dignity and independence of one who acknowledged Christ and called no man master. Speaking of Irving's friendship with these gifted men, one who knew him well said, "No act was done but in prayer; every blessing was received with thanksgiving to God; every friend was dismissed with a parting benediction." When he went to Lord Melbourne with an address on the needs of the country, as he and his companions were waiting for the interview in an anteroom, he had them all on their knees while he besought the Divine blessing on their undertaking. On retiring from the presence of the great Minister, Irving, holding him by the hand and with an air of apostolic authority, invoked the guidance of the Almighty on his administration.

But we must not think of him as an evangelist only to men of rank and genius. An address is extant to Scottish Journeymen Bakers resident in London and the neighbourhood, in which a brotherly hand is held out, and a proposal made to set apart Saturday evening once a fortnight for meeting and conversing with them. "Take this," it says, "in good part, my dear country-

men, and believe that it proceeds from a real interest in your welfare, especially in the welfare of your souls."

Unquestionably, however, his special call was to the noble; and although he was profoundly disappointed with the impermanency of the results, he reaped as great a measure of success as would have turned the head of a vainer man. He was, indeed, charged with vanity; but surely it was not like vanity to refuse the degree of D.D. from his *alma mater* on the ground that he had not sat an examination for it, or decline to print a sermon because both style and matter were, in his own opinion, deficient, notwithstanding the fact that it had been delivered before Royalty, and many requests had come to him to do so. Of course, like every other genius, he was fully conscious of the powers he possessed. A delightful evidence of this occurred at Rosneath on a visit to his friend Story. They were having a walk, and had reached a high barred gate. Irving had an athletic frame, and leaped over it at a bound. "Dear me, Irving," said his companion, "I did not think you had been so agile"; to which Irving immediately replied, "Once I read you an essay of mine, and you said, 'Dear me, Irving, I did not think you had been so classical.' Another time you heard me preach, 'Dear me, Irving, I did not know you had so much imagination.' Now you shall see what great things I will do yet."

We cannot read his life without seeing that he had also a nature rich in sympathy and humanity. Whether he entered a Bridgeton artisan's kitchen with his usual salutation, "Peace be to this house," or sat by the

bedside of a dying weaver, endeavouring to assure him of the love of God; whether he mixed in the society of London *savants*, or travelled the country scores of miles carrying a message from house to house,—he always strove to bear testimony to the truth, always aimed at a higher type of Christian life, and withal carried with him not the bearing of the priest only and the apostle, but that of the brother and the man.

Eloquent he must have been as, accompanied by fit gesture and sway, the rich Miltonic sentences poured themselves forth, holding an eager multitude entranced. But he was no mere orator. His power of attraction was always subservient to his desire to save. The evangelist was never lost in the rhetorician. The claims of eternity were ever kept in the forefront. Even in his private correspondence he wrote as M'Cheyne preached. Take one of the letters to his wife: "Oh, Isabella, put nothing off; my dearest, put nothing off; have nothing to do, have all besought, have all believed, have all done, and live quietly unto eternity! Say so to your dear father and mother and all the family. We know not what a day may bring forth. If you be languid, then cry for help; if you be under bondage, then cry for deliverance; and abide believing, abide believing; opening your heart to the admonitions of the Holy One—your ear to the admonitions of every faithful one. Turn aside from lies, from flattery, from vanity and folly. Be earnest, be grave—always ready. There will be no folly nor laughter nor bedimming of truth with false appearances nor masquerading in eternity."

Attention is here drawn to Irving's lofty seriousness

before his views are examined, because he has been spoken of as a vainglorious pulpiteer carried away with a craze for popularity, and at length driven mad thereby. By this manner of representing him an injustice has been done to his memory, and prejudice excited against his peculiar views. His pulpit oratory attracted educated London as sermons have seldom done before his time or since. It was Canning who lifted his genius into fame. He had been urged by Sir James Mackintosh to hear him, and he came away profoundly impressed. Thereafter the question of Church revenues came up for discussion in Parliament, and something was said about good remuneration being necessary to command high gifts. When Canning spoke, he told the House that on a recent occasion he had worshipped in a chapel owning no wealthy endowments, but he had listened to eloquence surpassing anything he had ever heard. Irving's name was immediately made, and his popularity mounted to the giddiest heights. People had to fight their way into his chapel, and accidents often occurred by reason of the crowds that besieged the doors.

Yet his preaching—sometimes consisting of thirteen sermons within eight days—was usually continued far beyond the limits so liberally allowed at the time. Even Dr. Chalmers complained about this in his diary. "I undertook to open Irving's new church in London. The congregation in their eagerness to obtain seats had already been assembled three hours. Irving said he would assist me by reading a chapter for me. He chose the longest in the Bible, and went on for an hour and a half. On another occasion he offered me the same aid,

adding, 'I can be short.' I said, 'How long will it take you?' 'Only an hour and forty minutes.'" He had an orator's knack of utilising opportunities. Once when describing the coming of the Son of Man, the church of a sudden darkened, the rumble of thunder was heard, a flash of lightning lit up the edifice, and a crashing peal followed, filling the people with consternation. Irving paused for a moment in his discourse, and in solemn tones pronounced the words, "For as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." The effect upon the congregation was powerful.

His greatest preaching triumph was in Edinburgh during the sittings of the Assembly. On that occasion an audience filled to overflowing the largest church in the city every morning at six o'clock. The early hour was chosen for two reasons, to exclude mere idlers and to suit the convenience of the ecclesiastics. At Annan, his native town, ten thousand souls assembled to hear their celebrated son, and listened from noon till after five, with only an hour's interval. At Kirkcaldy, where Carlyle and he had been schoolmasters together, the preacher's unparalleled fame brought about a distressing tragedy. One of the galleries was so overcrowded that it fell, and in the resulting panic thirty-five persons lost their lives. The catastrophe filled him with an overwhelming grief, and some people added to it by cruelly imputing the blame to Irving. The crowd of fashion that attended his London sermons at length began to melt away. They did not follow him from the old Caledonian Chapel to the new church at Regent's

Square. Irving was acutely disappointed. What he lamented was not his waning popularity, but the failure of his message to take permanent root. And this turn of the fashionable tide exercised a baneful influence on Irving's methods and views. It led him along new lines that ultimately raised him into the perilous heights of notoriety.

That new life which, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter many good men were seeking, Irving connected with the dawn of a new dispensation. In his opinion the ordinary means of grace were broken cisterns that held no water. Pentecostal days would only return by a reversion to Pentecostal methods and agencies. "You are content," he had said, speaking to certain brethren when he and they were crossing the Gareloch, "to go back and forward on the same route, like this boat; but as for me, I hope yet to go deep into the ocean of truth." At another time he claimed for the Church of his own day a participation in spiritual gifts as extraordinary as in any earlier time. "Think ye that Abraham took test of God by His dealings with Noah? or Moses by Abraham? or the Apostles at Pentecost by the Schools of the Prophets in Bethel or in Gilgal? If we have the Word of the Lord, we have the Word of the Lord and nothing else, and not thou or I, nay not Paul nor Peter nor Moses, but He of whose fulness they all received."[1]

While these revolutionary thoughts were occupying the attention of this profoundly spiritual soul, a movement was setting in on the banks of the Clyde, which, though small at first, was destined to become a world's

[1] Oliphant's *Life*, ii. 333.

wonder. Isabella Campbell after a singularly holy life had passed away, leaving behind her her sister Mary. The family to which the sisters belonged resided on the Gareloch, and had enjoyed the friendship of Mr. Story, their minister. They had another spiritual guide in A. J. Scott, then a licentiate of the Church of Scotland, and afterwards closely identified with Irving and his circle. Mary Campbell was looking forward to the position of a missionary's wife, when the sickness that closed the life of the saintly Isabella settled down on her. She became the centre of a remarkable little company of devout souls, who, without as yet knowing Irving, had come to share similar expectations to his about the return of apostolic gifts to the Church. The friends visiting her on a Sunday evening found to their amazement that the gift of tongues had come upon her. The gift of healing had likewise descended on certain of the little company. James Macdonald, the Port Glasgow shipbuilder, had, it was said, bidden his consumptive sister arise and stand upright, with the result that the woman obeyed the call and found herself cured. Mary Campbell, too, arose in like manner from her sickbed miraculously cured, and travelled from hamlet to hamlet addressing astonished gatherings. In her case it was believed the gift of tongues came opportunely with the recovery of her health in order to fit her as the missionary's wife to teach the heathen in their own language.

Many persons came from London to witness the wonderful manifestations, among them some of Irving's friends. The next thing we hear is the appearance of similar gifts at meetings in Regent's Square, greatly to the disturbance of staid old-fashioned

people there. Such people said little at first about the extravagances, partly because they were limited to meetings at non-canonical hours, partly out of respect for Irving. He, however, soon felt that he could not confine the gifts of the Spirit to small private gatherings. So long had he prayed for a day of Pentecost, that now it was come he felt he dare not hamper the movement, lest he should be found fighting against God. At his trial by the Church Courts he told how he had been led to admit it within the Church. "I had sat at the head of the church praying that these gifts might be poured out on the Church, believing in the Lord's faithfulness; and that I was praying the prayer of faith, and that He had poured out the gifts in the Church in answer to our prayers. Was I to disbelieve what in faith I had been praying for and which we had all been praying for? When it came I had every opportunity of proving it. I had put it to the proof according to the Word of God, and I found it, so far as I was able to discern, that it is the thing written in the Scriptures, and into the faith of which we had been baptized. Having found this, I was in a great strait between two opinions, and much burdened, God knoweth; for certain days, nay even weeks, my burden I could disclose to no one. A great burden it was, for I felt it was my duty to act; and I feared if I were to go seeking counsel of others, and any were to say, 'Do not introduce it into the church,' then I should be putting myself into a strait between my obedience to the Lord and my inclination to follow the counsel of wise men. In this state I remained some time, and I need not tell the leadings of Providence which led me at length to determine; but

it was very much the testimony of my own heart. In the morning meeting the Spirit burst out in the mouth of that witness whom you examined yesterday; and several times in one day the voice of the Spirit was that it was quenched and restrained in the church. I felt this very burthensome to me, and this conviction came at once to my heart: It belongs to you to open the door; you have the power of the keys; it is you that are restraining and hindering it. I reflected on it all that day, and next morning I came to the church. After prayers I rose up and said in the midst of them all, 'I cannot any longer be a party to hinder that which I consider to be the voice of the Holy Ghost from being held in the Church.'"[1]

From that time disorder reigned in Irving's church, and scenes of wild excitement were witnessed week by week that were a grief and humiliation to all who loved sane and sober religion. The screams and gesticulations of frenzied men and women, the loud outbursts of the speakers with tongues, their unintelligible babel of sounds, the spectacle of women running up and down the aisles waving their hands and beating their breasts, filled Irving's best friends with sorrow and even shame. His confidence in the new movement, however, never wavered. He declared to the trustees of the church his firm persuasion that the work going on within *their* sanctuary, which they were taking steps to prevent, was God's work, to blaspheme which was to blaspheme the Holy Ghost, to act against which was to act against the Holy Ghost. At the same time he upbraided them for their hostility, their love of

[1] Oliphant's *Life*, ii. 432.

ease in Zion, their fear of public odium, their aversion to whatever was new. The trustees, while they winced underneath these scoldings, remained firm in their resolve to limit the use of the church for the disorderly gatherings to non-canonical hours. Irving, believing the voices to be of God, could not silence them even in the public assembly. "It hath pleased Him," he said, "to give to some of us, in my church, this baptism, with its sign of speaking in unknown tongues and with its substance of prophesying; and I as His dutiful minister, standing in this room responsible (as ye all are) to Him, have not dared to believe that when we prayed to God for bread He would give us a stone; that when we asked for a fish He would send us a serpent; but believing that He is faithful who has promised, and trying the thing given by test of the Holy Scriptures and the testimony of God in my own conscience and in that of His people, and having thus been satisfied of the truth of the manifestations, I have not dared to put it to silence, as being the thing witnessed in the Holy Scriptures; and have ordered it, as I can show, in nothing contrary to the standards of the Church."[1]

Irving proved immovable. Once launched on his fanatical career, nothing was able to restore him to reason. There is ground for thinking that he duly counted the costs. "If I perish," he wrote to his brother and sister, "I perish." Friends and foes alike warned him of the ruin that lay before himself and his misguided followers, but in vain. The London *Times* in somewhat offensive language said: "The great body of Mr. Irving's adherents would probably have

[1] Oliphant's *Life*, ii. 422.

remained by him if in his headlong course of enthusiasm he could have found a resting-place. They might pardon his nonsense about the time and circumstances of the millennium. They might smile at unintelligible disquisitions about 'heads' and 'horns' and 'trumpets' and 'candlesticks' and 'white and black horses' in *Revelations*. These things might offend the judgment but did not affect the nerves. But have we the same excuse for the recent exhibitions with which the metropolis has been scandalised? Are we to listen to the screaming of hysterical women and the ravings of frantic men? Is bawling to be added to absurdity, and the disturber of a congregation to escape the police and treadmill, because the person who occupies the pulpit vouches for his inspiration?"

In Carlyle's *Reminiscences*, a large part of one volume is occupied with Irving's tragic career, and nothing is spoken by the cynical Chelsea seer but what is tender and kindly. Carlyle tells how his wife and he, calling on Irving, heard from an adjoining room, where a meeting was being held, the peculiar babel of tongues. They came away from the house grieved and indignant. Subsequently Carlyle tried to reason with him, but it had no effect.

Mrs. Oliphant describes Robert Baxter, his chief follower, arriving in hot haste from Yorkshire, with the announcement of the abandonment of the movement and his recantation of his claims to inspiration. She gives Baxter's own words— ; "I reached him on the morning of his appearance before the Presbytery of London. Calling him and Mr. J. Cardale apart, I told them my conviction that we had all been speaking by a lying

spirit and not by the Spirit of God."[1] When this act of apostasy was rushed upon poor Irving, there was a young man present who was the missionary in Regent's Square, David Brown by name, afterwards the venerable Principal of Aberdeen Free Church College. He has supplemented Mrs. Oliphant's narrative by telling us how Irving stood the shock. It would appear that, returning to the room after hearing Baxter's message, he said, "Let us pray," whereupon all present kneeled. Then Irving raised his voice in prayer: "Have mercy, Lord, on thy dear servant who has come up to tell us that he has been deceived, that his word has never been from above but from beneath, and that it is a lie. Have mercy on him, Lord: the enemy has prevailed against him, and hither he has come in this time of trouble and rebuke and blasphemy to break the power of the testimony we have to bear this day to this work of Thine. But let Thy work and power appear unto Thy poor servant."[2] Irving's fortitude and faith, as we see from Dr. Brown's touching reminiscence, were proof against the worst disaster. His attitude to the manifestations was different from that of A. J. Scott, afterwards Principal Scott of Owens' College, Manchester, whose tract on the *Charismata* had been the means of first directing Irving's thoughts to the subject. "Irving," says one who was present, "threw himself forward on his elbows and buried his face in his hands as if overcome with reverence; but Scott, who had offered prayer earlier in the meeting, sat erect with compressed lips and knit brows, as if keeping his intellect poised for the formation of a right judgment.

[1] Oliphant's *Life*, ii. 263. [2] *The Expositor* for October 1887.

The two men were revealed in their attitudes. The one fell before the fascination; the other stood firmly beyond its range."[1]

After hearing this report of an eye-witness, it is difficult to realise that Irving acknowledged himself more beholden to Coleridge for his knowledge of Divine truth than to any other. Addressing Coleridge in a dedicatory epistle, he had said, "You have been more profitable to my faith in orthodox doctrine, to my spiritual understanding of the Word of God, and to my right conception of the Christian Church, than any or all the men with whom I have entertained friendship and conversation."[2] Would that this impressionable genius had come more under such sane influences as this which he with characteristic gratefulness acknowledges, and that the whole sad tribe of prophetic pedants and hysterical pietists had gone their own way leaving him to go his! The Albury sages, as they were called, were no doubt a conclave of good and sincere men, but they made miserable shipwreck of Irving's genius and usefulness.

One man might have restored Irving to mental stability, namely, Story of Rosneath, his steadfast friend to the end; but it is just possible he would have refused to listen to what was in Story's power to divulge. Irving came to Glasgow in 1834, and, meeting Story, pleaded with his old friend to consider what was coming on the earth and enter an ark of safety. "I seldom bow my knee in prayer," he had once told a friend, "but I pray to God that Story may be brought to see the truth

[1] "A Garden of Graves" (*Sunday at Home*, 1881).
[2] Oliphant's *Life*, i. 205.

as I see it." The latter after his arrival at Glasgow addressed a copy of Mary Campbell's confession to him which he had received some time before, which ran in these words—; "I had before receiving your letter come to the resolution to write to you and to confess my sin and error for calling my own impressions the voice of God. Oh! it is no light thing to use that holy name irreverently, as I have been made to feel." Accompanying the confession, Story sent a note from himself exposing Mary Campbell's want of simplicity, and how disappointing a career hers had turned out, especially as she was considered "the most remarkable and conclusive evidence of the Holy Ghost being again with power in the midst of the Church."[1] Story concluded by confessing that he had greatly sinned in not exposing her earlier, but he had been restrained from doing this by feelings of affection. What change this letter might have wrought on Irving had he received it we cannot tell. Probably not even Story's voice could have now recalled him. But he never received the letter. Before it had time to be delivered, Irving was summoned to go forth and meet his Lord.

Although Regent's Square Church, London, was the scene of this remarkable display of religious excitement, across the border, where Scotsmen claimed Irving and his work as their own, the keenest interest was taken in the movement. There, however, it was universally disapproved. Logical and theological Scotland had no patience with it. To Scotsmen the continuity of a miraculous dispensation like that of the apostles

[1] *Life of Story of Rosneath* (p. 231, note).

to the present day appeared a manifest absurdity. A miraculous dispensation must needs be temporary, otherwise it is a contradiction in terms. Besides, if the Holy Ghost can still give men the gift of tongues, why do not our foreign missionaries receive it; or who would be likelier to receive it? If it be replied that miraculous gifts come only to those who exercise great faith, the logical Scot at once answered, great faith can dispense with the aid of miracles. Many able writers north of the Tweed joined in the controversy, as the pages of the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* testify. One of the most temperate of them put the matter in this form—; "Is there no danger of the blasphemy of the Spirit being committed when men tell us that the more unthinkable a language is, that is to say, the less evidence we have of its being a language at all, the greater is the proof of its having come from Him whose inspiration giveth us understanding? . . . Is there not something like a reflection on the arrangements of Providence and a tempting of the Spirit of the Lord, when it is seriously and boldly affirmed that at this late period in the world's history Jehovah has seen meet to institute a new 'ordinance' in favour of the female sex in particular, even the 'ordinance' of new tongues, in order that woman may be rescued from the cruel tyranny of man, and that man may be convinced by the most striking of all evidences that she is his coequal and coessential? All this and something more than this I have heard with my own ears . . . and all this, too, accompanied with the most unseemly infringements on that goodly order which

becomes the worship of God and the assemblies of the saints. God is not the author of confusion, but of peace."

From David Hume who rejected miracles, to Edward Irving and his friends who claimed to be workers of them, was a long step, especially for Scotsmen. The two men stood at exactly opposite poles, the one a philosopher, with the critical and sceptical faculties over-cultivated to the ruin of the finer perceptions; the other an orator, stirring men to noble deeds, but examining nothing critically or in the dry light of reason. And the Church of Scotland had less patience with the views of the visionary than with the negations of the philosopher, because the former diverted men from the voice of God speaking in His Word to voices speaking a babel of unintelligible jargon, and by that means encouraged schismatic courses of the most intolerable kind. Irving's was a noble genius notwithstanding his sad divergencies, and his contemporaries were inhumanly hard upon him. His eccentricities were nothing more than the delusions of a pious mind that had lost for the time its finely-adjusted balance. Yet this is doing him less than justice. It is grossly unfair to class him among those ill-starred men of genius whom much learning has made mad. He addressed other messages to the world besides those connected with a return to apostolic institutions. His doctrine of the human nature of our Lord was what he regarded as his principal message to the world. It brought him into deep waters with his ecclesiastial superiors, yet with all its crudity and over-statement it formed an

important contribution to Christian thought. To this subject we now turn our attention.

When Irving made his appearance as a Christian teacher, he found himself at variance with current notions on the subject of our Lord's human nature. It was a conviction with him that the views ordinarily believed and taught on this subject were unsatisfactory and unsound. There seemed to him to be few Christian teachers who felt the importance of holding and affirming our Lord's true humanity. He therefore resolved to do the subject greater justice than it usually received at the hands of the ordinary teacher of spiritual truth. The view he propounded was that Christ's human nature was *true* human nature, humanity of the substance of the Blessed Virgin, humanity—body and soul—under all the conditions of the Fall, tempted precisely as we are tempted, yet at all points triumphant; but triumphant not through difference in the properties and propensities of the humanity, but through the power of the Holy Ghost, which upheld it under temptation.

How earnestly and eloquently he urged these views we shall show from representative quotations from his writings. His advocacy of them procured him the condemnation of his Church; but there was that in his teaching on this difficult theme which has helped Christian preachers ever since, or, where it has failed to do this, has at least commanded their profound respect. Irving pressed his doctrine on this head strenuously, because he believed it to be vital to the maintenance of the religious life. "I believe," he said, "that my Lord did come down and toil and

sweat and travail in exceeding great sorrow in this mass of temptation with which I and every sinful man am oppressed: did bring His Divine presence into death-possessed humanity, into the one substance of manhood created in Adam, and by the Fall brought into a state of resistance and alienation from God, of condemnation and proclivity to evil, of subjection to the devil; and bearing it all on His shoulders in that very state into which God put it after Adam had sinned, did suffer its sorrows and pains and swimming anguish, its darkness, wasteness, disconsolateness, and hiddenness from the countenance of God; and by His faith and patience did win for Himself the name of the Man of Sorrows, and the Author and Finisher of our faith." [1]

When the controversy came on and had reached an acute stage, he declared in the preface to his book on the *Human Nature of Christ:* "The great point between us, the precious truth for which we contend, is not whether Christ's flesh (human nature) was holy, —for surely the man who saith we deny this blasphemeth against the manifest truth,—but whether during His life it was one with us in all its infirmities and liabilities to temptation, or whether by the miraculous generation it underwent a change so as to make it a different body from the rest of the brethren. They argue for an identity of origin merely; we argue for an identity of life also. They argue for an inherent holiness; we argue for a holiness maintained by the person of the Son through the operation of the Holy Ghost." [2]

Irving's predispositions were the reverse of sceptical and revolutionary. On all the burning questions of

[1] Oliphant's *Life*, ii. 109. [2] Hair's *Regent Square*, p. 91, *note*.

his day, the Apocrypha question, for example, and the Catholic Disabilities Act, his leanings were distinctly conservative. He was naturally disinclined to novelties and heresies in religion. To be deemed a heretic was not a position that had any fascination for him. "I shall never forget" he said, "the feeling which I had upon first hearing my name coupled with heresy. So much did it trouble me, that I once seriously meditated sending a paper to the *Christian Observer* in order to contradict the man's false insinuations. But I thought it better to sit quiet and bear the reproach."[1]

It never occurred to him, when he propounded his views on Christ's human nature, that there were two opinions in any orthodox creed and true Church on the subject. As it was sound doctrine to believe that but for sin neither suffering nor death would have entered the world, so he regarded it as most orthodox to conclude that neither could they meet and inflict their wound on anyone save as he was an inheritor of the nature of fallen humanity. "That suffering can come to a fallen creature without any sinful act of his own, is manifest in every child that is born; and that death can come to a fallen creature without any sinful act of his own, is manifest in every child that dies; and therefore there is no difficulty whatever in believing that without any sinful act of the will Christ in a fallen nature should both suffer and die, because this very thing is the universal experience of every fallen creature. But there is not such a thing in the records of being as that an unfallen creature should suffer. The will must fall first by sinning before suffering can be felt. But

[1] Oliphant's *Life*, ii. 8.

that in the fallen state the just should suffer for the unjust and the innocent for the guilty, is the great truth experienced of all: seeing God visits the sins of the fathers and the sin of Adam especially upon those who have as yet no power of will whereby to commit a sin: so that I may truly say the whole history and constitution of man's estate under the Fall is to the very end of schooling us into the method of the incarnation; of teaching us how without evil actings of the will suffering and death may be experienced by a creature in the fallen state."[1] "Death being the proper penalty of sin, the sign of God's holiness and justice upon a sinning man is not to be reached or come at by any person otherwise than through the way of sin. If a sinless person could die, then death could not be the sign of God's hatred of sin; for in that case it would without sin be neglected. Now, that Christ is a sinless person we all admit, and how then could He reach death? He could not reach it by coming in a sinless and unfallen nature such as Adam's; for such a nature, not having sinned, could not die without making death void as the great sign of God's holiness. To reach death there is no other way but by coming in the nature of a sinful creature; in that nature which, having sinned, did underlead the curse of death. If with His holy person He inform this nature He may die; nay, He must die: for when human nature was sentenced in the person of Adam to death, it was all sentenced, every particle of it whatever; and the death of it is the grand demonstration of God's holy hatred and final justice against sin; and therefore agreeing that the

[1] *Human Nature of Christ*, p. 73.

death of the clean and innocent Lamb of God is the means unto our redemption or atonement,—I say it could not otherwise be reached but through His taking humanity, fallen, sinful, and under death."[1]

Astounded as orthodox opinion was at the announcement of these notions, Irving did not for one moment suspect that *heresy* lurked in them. "I believe it to be most orthodox," he said, "and of the substance and essence of the orthodox faith, to hold that Christ could say till His resurrection, not I, but sin that tempteth Me in My flesh: just as after the resurrection He could say, I am separate from sinners. And, moreover, I believe that the only difference between His body of humiliation and His body of resurrection is in this very thing, that sin inhered in the human nature, making it mortal and corruptible till that very time that He rose from the dead; and if this principle must go to the wall, I shall go to the wall along with it."[2]

Not only did he believe himself in accord with the teaching of the orthodox faith, however his views may have collided with the popular religion of his own time. He pressed them upon the attention of the Church under the impression that they were vital to the welfare of true piety. In the popular religion of the time there was much coldness and formality, God and the soul were strangers to one another. Irving, deploring this gulf, aimed at bridging it over, and with this object in view searched for means by which he could bring home to his fellow-men the precious truth of Christ's incorporation with humanity, and give the doctrine of Incarnation a fundamental place in theology. Most

[1] *Human Nature of Christ*, p. 91. [2] *Ibid.* p. 127.

ingenious was his use of Regeneration to bring this out. "In its natural propensities we undoubtedly hold, and to the death will maintain, and for the faith of it shall have to praise God through eternity, that Christ's human nature, His undivided manhood, was in all respects as ours ; but, being anointed with the Holy Ghost and animated by the power of the Son of God, it was ever in that state of subjection and subordination to God in which the regenerate man ought to be and is whenever he doeth good." "Was He conscious, then, to the motions of the flesh and of the fleshly mind? In so far as any regenerate man when under the operation of the Holy Ghost is conscious of them. Yea, verily, He knew the evil law of that nature He was clothed with: He knew every point and passage of it, and at every point and passage of it He met it with the Spirit and drove it back, and put bonds upon it, and led it forth again tamed and reclaimed: a servant of Himself, an unwilling servant, and still in all things a servant unto God. I hold it to be the surrender of the whole question to say that He was not conscious of, engaged with and troubled by, every evil disposition which inhereth in the fallen manhood, which overpowereth every man that is not born of God: which overpowered not Christ, only because He was born or generated of God: the Son of God that day begotten in the flesh when He was conceived of the Virgin. I say that to yield a jot of this is to yield all: I will not yield a jot of it: I will suffer loss of all things sooner, and death itself, than suffer the doctrine to be shaken so long as I can help it."[1] "It is of the

[1] *Human Nature of Christ*, p. 110.

essence of the truth, it is all that the truth is worth, to maintain that Regeneration or impartation of the Holy Ghost addeth nothing, withdraweth nothing, changing nothing of our created substance, but by an invisible person of Godhead controlleth and overcometh it: so necessary is it to believe likewise of Christ's human nature, that its generation of the Holy Ghost added and altered nothing of its creature's substance, but ever operated by Godhead-power to restrain and subdue and sanctify and uphold all its motions and actions. This was His great work of humiliation and sufferings; and believing this, I were found a most unworthy and unfaithful witness to what He did for me and for all the world, did I not repudiate and resist those who cut His work short and exhibit it as some holiday engagement or incomprehensible action, instead of a comprehensible self-inflicted degradation for the end of meeting sin in its own stronghold, and redeeming both soul and body from its dominion."[1]

In his sermon on the Incarnation, in language of terrific boldness Irving thus shows the bearing of the views now quoted on the question of the sinfulness of sin: "That sin should be able to struggle with Godhead itself, that a fragment of the perilous stuff being assumed into the personality of the Son should weigh down the Almighty One from His delectation in the bosom of the Father and make Him say, 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' that a fragment of the perilous stuff being taken into the person of the Living One, Life of life, should agonise Him with hunger and thirst, and oppress Him with weariness, and tempt Him with

[1] *Human Nature of Christ*, p. 3.

the round world's idle state; should make the Divine Person groan and weep and sweat great drops of blood, and be passive to all suffering which flesh is heir to,—this is the mightiest demonstration of sin's iron gripe and deadly hold, proving it to be all but the mightiest power in being."

Principal Brown, in his brief but valuable reminiscences, says that Irving's temerity filled all Scotland with alarm. He was charged with blasphemously impeaching the holiness of Jesus Christ. From Cole, the idle Church of England parson, who first raised the cry of heresy, to the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, whose attacks were positively indecent, this was the unjust charge which one railing tongue bandied about to another. "What I felt," gasped the virtuous Cole, "at hearing such awful blasphemy against the person of the Son of God, declaimed with accompanying vehement gesticulations before upwards, I should suppose, of two thousand persons, I cannot describe."[1]

There was, of course, no denial of our Lord's absolute freedom from sin on Irving's part, nor would it have been possible to impute such to him had not the Church been asleep at the time, and, as he said, "awaked in bad humour and spake angrily about things before her eyes were well opened." The question in dispute was not as to Christ's holiness, but whether His holiness was due to some physical superiority of His nature rather than to the triumphant working of moral power. "The great point at issue is simply this, whether Christ's flesh had the grace of sinlessness and incorruption from its proper nature

[1] Oliphant's *Life*, ii. 7.

or from the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. I say the latter."[1]

At his trial before the Annan Presbytery, — from whom he received his licence as a preacher of the gospel, — which took place in March 1833, he warmly repudiated the charge of impeaching the character of Christ,—a charge, to their lasting discredit, brought against him by almost all his prosecutors. Speaking under intense excitement, he said: "As to my maintaining that Christ is other than most holy, I do protest that it is not true. It is not true!—before the living God I do declare it is false. And though all men should say it is true, I say it is false, and that it proceeds from the father of lies. It has been held up in every pulpit within this land that I have preached and disseminated doctrines inconsistent with the unity of God. Albeit I deny it—I deny it! It is a lie. It has not a shadow of foundation in truth. I would give my life, and if I had ten thousand lives I would give them all, to maintain the contrary. It is an unjust slander. I never wrote, I never preached such damnable doctrine: and that all honest men can say. I stand in this place and say that I am ready to die for it. . . . I stand here a witness for the Lord Jesus, to tell men what He did for them: and what He did was this—He took your flesh and made it holy, thereby to make you holy; and therefore He will make every one holy who believes in Him."[2]

He ended his defence in an outburst of impassioned declamation. "Mock me not by speaking of popularity.

[1] Oliphant's *Life*, ii. 11. [2] *Ibid.* ii. 344.

The reproaches of a brother are hard to bear. Ye know not what I have suffered: you know not what it is to be severed from a flock you love: to be banished from your house: to be driven from a place of worship in which ye have been honoured, as God's servants, by the tokens of His approbation. Yet though thus scorned and trampled on, truth is prevailing. You shall not go one half mile in London but you shall see some of our Scottish youth, yea, and of our English youth also, standing up to preach that truth for which I now appear at this bar. At Charing Cross, at London Bridge, at the Tower, and in all the high places of the city, you shall find them preaching to a perishing people; and though often hooted and pelted, yet patient withal. And I am sure the day is not far distant when the Evangelist shall go forth and be listened to throughout the land. Ministers and elders of the Presbytery of Annan! I stand at your bar by no constraint of man. You could not—no person on earth could—have brought me hither. I am a free man on a free soil, and living beyond your bounds. Neither General Assembly nor Pope has a right to meddle with me. Yea, I know ye have sinned against the Head of the Church in stretching thus beyond your measure, and this sin ye must repent of. . . . Is it nothing, think ye, that ye have brought me from my flock of nine hundred souls, besides children, looking up to me for spiritual food? Is it nothing that ye have taken me away from ruling among my apostles and elders, and brought me three hundred miles to stand before you at this bar? . . . I stand here not by constraint, but willingly. Do what

you like, I ask not judgment of you; my judgment is with my God."[1]

In these views on the human nature of our Lord, Irving held that he followed the Scottish Confession of 1560, a document which he was in the habit of reading to his congregation twice every year, so great was his admiration for it. He called it the *pillar of the Reformation*, and said it was "written in a most honest, straightforward, manly style, without compliment or flattery, without affectation of logical precision and learned accuracy, as if it came fresh from the heart of laborious workmen, all the day long busy with the preaching of the truth, and sitting down at night to embody the heads of what was continually taught."[2] What the worthy document—still a standard of the Scottish Church—teaches on the human nature of our Lord will be found in the 8th article, and is expressed in these quaint words: "It behooved that the Sonne of God suld descend unto us and tak Himselfe a bodie of our bodie, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bones, and so become the Mediator betwixt God and man, giving power to so many as beleeve in Him to be the sonnes of God."

Whether this statement can bear the construction put on it by those who hold the doctrine of peccability, is open to question. Irving believed it could. Most people at the time thought him mistaken. They held that, however firmly he repelled the blasphemy imputed to him, his views involved him in a denial of Christ's absolute sinlessness. He contented himself with

[1] Oliphant's *Life*, ii. 346.
[2] Schaff's *History of the Creeds*, p. 684.

repeated and emphatic repudiation of the charge. At an early period in the controversy he inserted one of his protests in a newspaper. In addition to the signatures of himself and his fellow office-bearers, it bore that of "David Brown, Missionary." It is an interesting document. The signatories declared that they "utterly detest and abhor any doctrine that would charge with sin, original or actual, our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ . . . and we further declare that all our peace of conscience, progress in sanctification, and hope of eternal blessedness resteth upon the sinlessness of that sacrifice, and the completeness of that atonement which He hath made for us as our substitute."[1] How low the ethics of controversy had fallen since Hume's time, may be seen by the language of the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* towards the high-toned document just quoted. "If the manifesto which has issued from Mr. Irving and his associates is not a gross violation of the very first principles of *integrity*, we know not what that virtue is nor what that word means." "They will say anything to suit their purpose, being the basest and most unprincipled controversialists that ever set a foot upon the surface of the religious world."

For some time previous to 1831, a Committee of General Assembly had been at work investigating the reports as to the recent publication of erroneous writings. It soon transpired that they had specially in view two of Irving's works, *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine*, published in 1830, and *Christ's Holiness in the Flesh*, in 1831. They reported to the Assembly

[1] Oliphant's *Life*, ii. 164.

that these contained a distinct "assertion of the sinful corruption of Christ's human nature, and a rebellion in Christ's natural will to the will of God"; and the Assembly, by 147 votes to 38, enjoined any Presbytery within whose bounds Irving should appear in a ministerial capacity, to call him into their presence, lay the books before him, demand of him whether he acknowledged their authorship, and proceed accordingly.

The following year they advanced a step further, instructing the Presbytery of Annan to proceed against him by libel. The trial took place on 13th March 1833. According to a contemporary chronicle, "Mr. Irving arrived at Annan by the London Mail, and was met by Mr. Ker of London, one of his deacons. A crowd was collected in the street, in expectation of the reverend gentleman's arrival by the mail; and upon his alighting at the house of his brother-in-law, Mr. Dickson, where the coach stopped on its way to the inn, the crowd, which was at that time dispersed in groups, ran eagerly to the spot to catch a glimpse of their celebrated townsman. In the course of the forenoon hundreds of individuals of all classes kept pouring into Annan from the neighbourhood. . . . Twelve o'clock was the hour appointed for the proceedings to commence at the parish church, and by that time the place was literally crammed. It is computed that at least two thousand persons were assembled."[1]

The trial lasted six hours, and ended in deposition. In the same church where he had been baptized, and where, seventeen years before, he had preached his first sermon, Edward Irving, singularly enough, was

[1] Oliphant's *Life*, ii. 342.

deposed. He never thought of taking an appeal to the higher Courts of the Church, and did not even wait to hear the sentence pronounced; but he loitered in the romantic border-country, addressing open-air gatherings, convinced that he had a call to those who thronged to hear him, who were as sheep without a shepherd. "When I saw the gross darkness of these poor ministers" (who had presumed to judge and sentence him), "and the errors with which they have filled the breasts and minds of the people in all these parts, I was much and powerfully convinced that it is my duty to tarry here some days and preach the gospel to the benighted people around."[1]

Irving's "heresies" reminded many of the old errors of Bourignianism, and on that account were deemed intolerable. Antoinette Bourignon was a French visionary of the seventeenth century, settled in Holland, who indulged in many mystical extravagances, and drew around her an admiring following. Her views penetrated to Scotland, and proved fascinating to some of the Episcopal clergy of that unsettled time. Antoinette regarded religion as an inward experience of the soul that is quite independent of Church or Scriptures. Acts denouncing her *heresies* were passed by the Kirk in 1701, 1709, and 1710, and licentiates were sworn among other errors to disown Bourignianism. In addition to a doctrine of Christ's human nature similar to that for which Irving was condemned, Bourignianism included doctrines such as neither he nor any instructed theologian could have

[1] Oliphant's *Life*, ii. 352.

much sympathy with, and formal deposition was pronounced by the Assembly on an Episcopalian minister of Aberdeen for supporting several of the Bourignian tenets. Hetherington disposes of Bourignianism in a way that shows how lightly Irving's case sat on the ecclesiastical mind. Speaking of Bourignian views, he says: "It would be inexpedient to state here what these heretical opinions were; but it may be mentioned in passing that some of them are much akin to several of those with which Religion has been disturbed in our own times."[1]

Scotland's greatest son, at the time, was Dr. Chalmers, and the part he played in the controversy has been severely animadverted on by several writers. Although the intimate friend of both Irving and Macleod Campbell, at the acutest crisis in their lives he seems to have observed a neutrality strangely out of keeping with his usual independence, and, however to be accounted for, most remarkable. It may have been that the position of a great party leader demanded silence when a less responsible person could have boldly spoken out. On the other hand, the probability is that Dr. Chalmers' passivity was due to a failure to understand the new thought that was breaking loose from a dead traditionalism. We know that when Irving took him to visit Coleridge, with whom they spent three hours, Chalmers declared that the conversation which they heard was to him astonishing and incomprehensible. It was only at intervals he caught sight of the seer's meaning—; "On returning from this interview," so his biographer tells us, "Dr.

[1] *History of the Church of Scotland*, ii. 226.

Chalmers remarked to Mr. Irving upon the obscurity of Coleridge's utterances, and said that for his part he liked to see all sides of an idea before taking up with it." "Ha!" said Mr. Irving in reply, "you Scotchmen would handle an idea as a butcher handles an ox. For my part, I love to see an idea looming through the mist." Mrs. Oliphant, in her excellent biography of Irving, accuses Dr. Chalmers of wanting courage. In this she is unfair to a great man's memory. Chalmers kept silence not for want of courage to speak out, but for want of faculty to understand this new evangelicalism of which Irving and Macleod Campbell were the apostles and high priests. Chalmers would not condemn, nor could he defend the new thought. Macleod Campbell tells us that he went and laid his views before Dr. Chalmers, and that, unlike the average clergyman of the period, whose habit was first to pronounce the views erroneous and next proceed to put the author of them right, Dr. Chalmers, like the philosopher he was, undertook to weigh them carefully before coming to a conclusion, and at the same time, like a true friend, expressed the hope that Macleod Campbell would win his case. The likelihood is that he felt kindlier on the whole to the latter's presentation of the truth than to the strange opinions of Irving. But in the case of both it is next to certain that his regrettable silence was due to the hesitancy of an undecided mind, and not to the influence of temporising motives.

Nothing was nearer Irving's heart than to bring Christ's person and work into closer relations to all who looked to Him for salvation. That being so, no

service should have been more cordially welcomed by all who valued true religion, for it is not uncharitable to say that religion in Irving's time was a thing in the clouds for most people, and the great need was to have it brought down to human nature's level. Since his day, and largely by the spread of his aims, the Church has corrected her former mistakes. She has gone back to Christ and made a study of Christology. Biographies of Jesus Christ have multiplied: New Testament Theology and Christian Ethics have now a place assigned to them equally with Dogmatics and Church History: the fact of the Incarnation has received greater prominence and honour in the writings of divines; and in other important directions the contendings of Edward Irving for a Redeemer at once human and Divine have borne rich fruit.

He went wrong in imagining that the Saviour could not be a real partaker of our nature unless He came in sinful flesh. He did not perceive that so coming He must needs be involved in all the consequences of the Fall. From a logical as well as from a Christological point of view, his position was untenable. The error lay in confounding accident and substance. He looked on sinfulness as if it were an essential part of human nature; as if instead of being an accident and disease it were a substantial element of man's constitution. This was his error. It was an error to maintain that to be a real man one has to partake of a sinful nature. The crowning proof to the contrary is Christ Himself. As Bishop Gore has said, the evidence that sin is not according to man's true nature, "that it is rebellion and not nature,

lies in the fact that in Christ, the true Man, sin had no place."[1] Irving testified to a great truth when he declared that what restrained our Lord from sin was something else than a nature to which sin was impossible. What was impossible to Him was an impossibility of *consenting* to sin.

[1] Gore's *Bampton Lectures*, p. 167.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ROW HERESY

AUTHORITIES

Reminiscences, by Dr. Macleod Campbell. Lond. 1873.
Memorials of John Macleod Campbell. By his Son. Lond. 1877.
The Nature of the Atonement. By Dr. Macleod Campbell. Camb. 1856.
The whole Proceedings in the Case of the Rev. John Macleod Campbell. Greenock, 1831.
Proof for the Prosecution in the Case of John Macleod Campbell. Greenock, 1831.
"Scottish Influence upon English Theological Thought." D. J. Vaughan, *Contemporary Review*, xxxii.
Life of F. D. Maurice. By Frederick Maurice. Lond. 1884.
Memoirs of Bishop Ewing. By A. J. Ross. Lond. 1877.
Mitchell's *Introduction to the Minutes of the Westminster Assembly.* Edin. 1874.
Letters of Erskine of Linlathen. Hanna. Edin. 1878.
Erskine of Linlathen. By the present Author. Edin. 1899.

A BEAUTIFUL, serious soul, as his son's *Memorials* clearly reveal, a man interested in all the thought of his strenuous time, yet viewing all things *sub specie æternitatis*, John Macleod Campbell suffered at his brethren's hands the full penalty of ecclesiastical rigour because of peculiar theological views. In whatever way we look at these views now, whether we superciliously pass them by as some have done, and dispose of him as a mere eccentric thinker, or, on the other hand, regard him as a teacher worthy of the highest

respect, of this there can be no question, that for the finer orthodoxy of the heart, for supreme and untainted loyalty to Christ, for singular sweetness and charm of disposition, no Church in Scotland has produced his equal. One ignorant of the ways of Scotsmen might marvel that such attractive qualities did not secure for him at the time a larger number of friends and admirers. But in the realm of theological controversy Scotsmen have never allowed personal considerations of this kind to influence their judgment. They have invariably placed a stern extinguisher on all sentimental feelings. A heretic might be a person in all respects a paragon of virtue, a character worlds superior to his orthodox persecutors,—this has weighed not a grain with Scotsmen in their verdict upon his heresies. They have proceeded to the condemnation and punishment of the heretic all the same, their wrath no more restrained by his amiable qualities than was John Knox's by the charms of Queen Mary.

In the case of the Row heresy there was an additional cause of dislike, in spite of its author's winning character. Scotsmen have never relished their spiritual food too highly seasoned. They have a strong distaste for the element of enthusiasm and religious assurance. They have enjoyed a religion that they could argue and fight over, but they have not readily taken to one that has abounded in rapture and ecstasy. Now Macleod Campbell's teaching ran counter to his countrymen's prejudices in this regard, and at an early period in his career he apprehended trouble arising from this cause. What militated against the reception of his message was, that it demanded from men

personal belief, personal awakening, personal assurance; and this demand, made tenderly as became a message of grace, was yet enforced with such insistence that it caused them discomfort, and aroused in the more hot-headed a hurricane of opposition. On this account they were led to exaggerate the unsound element in his teaching, and combined together to crush him; and as his zeal for personal assurance put their indifference to shame, they became the more zealous advocates of rigid orthodoxy. An example of the serious spirit in which he entered into his ministerial vocation occurred at the funeral of Isabella Campbell of Gareloch fame, of whom we have spoken in the previous chapter. The day happened to be wet, and the funeral party were crowded into the cabin of a steamer on their way to the burying-ground. "Then," Macleod Campbell tells us, "I stated to them that I felt it my duty to improve the time in saying something of what it had been my privilege to know of her whose remains we accompanied. And, having once begun to speak, I proceeded to explain the secret spring of all that distinguished her—the simplicity of the assurance of her faith; and then I pressed that faith on them; and God enabled me to speak from the time I commenced till the boat stopped, which would be an hour and a half."[1] A clergyman taking his office thus seriously was not the favourite type of the period; nor need we wonder that when he appeared in the ecclesiastical arena, and it became noised abroad that besides being a man of extraordinary devoutness he was the holder of strange

[1] Macleod Campbell's *Memorials*, i. 45.

theological notions, the ordinary ecclesiastical person was not disposed to regard him too favourably.

As a preacher, Macleod Campbell excelled in powerful personal application, like all the famous preachers of former days. What he aimed at was not the propagation of new views, but the production of religious impressions, the rescue of men from the gross darkness which covered the land; and while the heresy hunt was pursuing him up and down the country, he had some good opportunities for accomplishing his purpose. For instance, on a summer Sabbath evening of the famous year 1832, he preached in the new churchyard of Greenock to a congregation numbering six thousand souls.

One of the charms of Macleod Campbell's character was the ideal relation in which he stood to all the members of his family. His father, also a clergyman of the Church of Scotland, was his son's confidential friend, and to him he forwarded during the period of strain a weekly budget describing all he felt and did. The elder Campbell was a member of the Assembly that deposed him. Before the vote was taken, he addressed the House in the most affecting terms. "I bow to any decision," he said, "to which you may think it right to come. Moderator, I am not afraid for my son; though his brethren cast him out, the Master whom he serves will not forsake him; and while I live, I will never be ashamed to be the father of so holy and blameless a son."[1] This was finely spoken, but it sets the laws of those days in a painful light to find that the Church required of the old man to read from his pulpit a document condemning the

[1] *Memorials*, i. 78.

doctrines for which his son was cast out. This the Church required; but, disregarding her orders, he refused to pronounce anathema on one who, besides being so gifted and good, was his own flesh and bone.

The ideal relations to which we have referred are seen in Macleod Campbell's intercourse with his children, especially in his letters to them. In these letters he sends them advice regarding their studies, their prospects in life, their pleasures, the habit of theatre-going, and so on, that make them model compositions of their kind. His sweet seriousness comes out in these dealings with his children, as it does also in all his books and public appearances. As Norman Macleod said, there was no one whose character so closely resembled that of Jesus Christ.

In controversy he was a model of dignity and fair play. Always willing to be proved in the wrong, if that were possible, he regarded himself only as a servant of the truth. Ready, too, at all times to give the views of an opponent the best possible presentation, he could not abide the ordinary controversialist's craze for votes and victories. All he sought was the triumph of righteousness and truth. In another respect he and the worldly type of controversialist differed entirely. Instead of asking with the latter what was the teaching of the Church on any subject, and what did she require her servants to declare, he was wont to ask what *Truth* demanded from her servants, and what was the teaching of *her* voice.

We are now to follow the life-work of this remarkable man, an epoch-making man in theology and one of unique personality, whose character, according to

his judges, the breath of scandal never dared touch. Ordained to the ministry at Row on the Gareloch in 1825, at a time of much spiritual darkness, it was soon discovered that a light had arisen in the Church sky that might yet prove blinding and bewildering to many through sheer excess of brightness. Events soon proved that these alarms were only too well grounded. Mutterings of dissatisfaction with the new and unfamiliar teaching of the Row pulpit began to fall cautiously from the lips of grave and godly parishioners. The murmurs gradually grew more articulate, until at length a memorial was handed round for signature, complaining to the Church Courts regarding the alleged heresy. The memorial was lodged with the proper authorities early in the year 1830. This step on the part of the memorialists was not approved by all, and a counter-memorial was drawn up bearing the signatures of eighty householders and heads of families, who expressed "their undiminished attachment to Mr. Campbell as their pastor," and trusted "that nothing would be done by the Presbytery to weaken the hands of so faithful a minister of the gospel." Campbell's spiritual superiors having these documents before them, directed him to give them a sample of his doctrine from the Row pulpit. Campbell did as required. When they heard the discourse there were two statements which they received with marked disapproval: that "God loves every child of Adam with a love the measure of which is to be seen in the agonies of Christ"; and "the person who knows that Christ died for every child of Adam is the person who is in the condition to say to

every human being, Let there be peace with you—peace between you and your God."[1]

Not understanding these statements, the good men went home and framed a libel against the author of them, charging him with uttering unsound doctrine. Campbell was then tried before the inferior Court in the first instance, and was found guilty of having "entertained and promulgated the doctrine of universal atonement and pardon through the death of Christ; and also the doctrine that assurance is of the essence of faith, and necessary to salvation."[2] The case went next on appeal, according to the forms of the Church, from Presbytery to Synod, and from Synod to General Assembly. The supreme tribunal gave a decision against Campbell by one hundred and nineteen votes to six; that is, out of a total membership of over three hundred, of which the General Assembly consisted, only one hundred and twenty-five took part in a vote which excommunicated from the pale of the Church the saintliest and one of the most learned of its servants. Passing over this extraordinary phase of the trial for the present, it is worth recording that there were some like Erskine of Linlathen, one of Campbell's great friends, who viewed the Disruption which occurred twelve years afterwards as a doom inflicted on the Kirk for the harsh measures which she meted out to this man of God.

Everyone acquainted with Scotland knows what droll characters some of the old Scottish judges were, how harsh their treatment of prisoners, how grotesque their administration of law. As we read the proceedings in the trial of John Macleod Campbell, we are sometimes

[1] *Case* (xix.). [2] *Memorials*, i. 69.

reminded of these antique worthies. Not that ecclesiastical procedure in the thirties of the nineteenth century was as barbarous as the criminal trials of Lord Braxfield's time, but it can be alleged without breach of charity that many of Campbell's judges were persons who eyed the meek Christian standing at their bar as no better than the worst moral delinquent whom it was their duty to hurry to the cells below as quickly as possible. We say this after hearing what they said of him. For instance, one of them in the course of the trial informed the Court, evidently with the intention of prejudicing the case, that all the clergymen of the Church of Scotland had refused to hold professional intercourse with him; another, with a guffaw, said, "Some of us might have been his father: and without any great arrogance I may say that we had as much divinity as he has before he was born: and we may be allowed to have made some addition to it during the thirty years he has been in the world." The same blustering divine objected to the accused being allowed to quote the Holy Scriptures in his defence: "We are far from appealing to the Word of God on this ground: it is by the Confession of Faith that we must stand: by it we hold our livings."[1]

Perhaps the most cruel and hurtful reproach brought against Campbell was when, imitating Socrates' accusers, they charged him with the dissemination of ideas tending to the corruption of youth. The saintly man smarted under this reproach. He had the best of reasons for knowing that the effect of his teaching, like the aim and intention of it, was the reverse of what

[1] *Case* (xxix.).

they slanderously reported. At the time such charges were being recklessly circulated, he had in his possession testimony to the power of his teaching from the very class he was supposed to be contaminating. In a letter to his sister at this time he said: "I have heard some encouraging things that I would just mention. Standing in Mr. Wilson's wareroom"—a Glasgow merchant —"last week, a man came in whom Mr. Wilson introduced to me. The man immediately took me by the hand, taking off his hat with his other hand, and with his eyes full said: 'Dear sir, I am most thankful to meet you. The first ray of spiritual light that ever entered my mind was through you at Paisley three years ago, and up to that time I was a Socinian.' A young man, a printer, employed in the printing-office in which my sermons were printed, took home with him one night a damaged sheet to read it. He was struck, and showed it to his mother. It took hold of her, and this incident was the commencement of a reading of the sermons, tracts, etc., in that house, which has issued in the father, mother, brothers, and sisters being now all rejoicing in God."[1] Nor were such testimonies either few or limited to a particular class. From the Greenock shoemaker who refused payment of an account, saying, "Sir, you will pay nothing. I trust I may say I owe you a thousand times more," to the English Church clergyman, author of a volume of Christian evidences bearing the dedication, "To my honoured friend, John Macleod Campbell, this little volume is respectfully dedicated in grateful acknowledgment of many invaluable lessons learned from his works," a cloud of

[1] *Memorials*, i. 105.

witnesses could be gathered to testify to the purifying and ennobling tendency of his influence. The new ideas, when they were fortunate enough to find lodgment in youthful minds, invariably awoke a new joy and enkindled a fresh interest in religious things.

Campbell was deposed in 1831, and by 1833 he was surrounded by a circle of disciples, gathered from Glasgow and the West country, to whom he continued ministering week by week and day by day, till the excessive strain brought on a temporary breakdown in health. During this season his teaching and personality acted as a leaven quietly and unnoticed, but ultimately permeated the whole character of theological thinking. Charged as he was with good tidings to men, he could not choose but publish them. Three times a Sunday and once on Mondays in Glasgow; every Tuesday in Paisley, each Friday in Greenock, for years, that was his weekly programme of work.

There is reason to believe that he would have been welcomed into the ministry of the Church of England; but besides other reasons against it, he was too honest a man to take refuge in a Church whose creed was identical with that of his own Church, at least on the points on which she cast him out. Yet he never felt easy in his isolated position. "So far am I myself," he says, "from being contented with it, that my heart's cry to Him in whose hands I feel myself is, that in His own time and way He would deliver me from it: though in this sense I seek to be contented, that I endeavour to bear this cross as long as He may lay it upon me."[1]

In addition to his unwearied propaganda by the

[1] *Memorials*, i. 190.

living voice, he devoted the years now before him to the preparation of works for the press. The first of these appeared in 1851, being a volume on the Eucharist in reply to the teaching of the Church of Rome, and was entitled "The Bread of Life." The following year appeared "Fragments of Truth," being expositions of passages of Scripture, a work that has gone through four editions, the last being so recent as 1898. "Fragments of Truth" was a book that Charles Kingsley read and enjoyed. Next came his *magnum opus* in 1854, "The Nature of the Atonement," the work he is best known by, and which has gone through several editions. In the days when he occupied the pulpit at Row he had proclaimed a universal Atonement. Now he fulfilled a long-cherished wish to follow up his testimony to the universality of the Atonement with an exposition of its nature. The late Principal Tulloch of St. Andrews directed his students' attention to this work, strongly recommended it to the young men, and commented on it in two lectures to his Divinity class. Campbell felt that the Church of Scotland, by this action of Tulloch's, had made a certain amend to him.

His last theological effort was called forth by the publication of the famous "Essays and Reviews," which fell upon the Christian world like a bombshell in the early sixties. This was "Thoughts on Revelation," published in 1862, in which he develops his teaching on *Assurance* of the old Row days, precisely as in his book on the Nature of the Atonement he supplied a corollary to his old proclamation of its universality. In this work there is a marked improvement in the quality of lucidity. After its appearance Norman Macleod wrote

him: "I left a copy of your noble book at Florence with the Free Kirk minister there. What a marvellous advance you have made in diction! This book is as clear as sunshine." In the year 1868 his *alma mater*, the University of Glasgow, conferred on Campbell the degree of D.D. "Few," said Bishop Ewing, "who have had any interest in the religious life of Scotland for the last forty years but will regard the event with deep emotion, significant as it is of the change in religious feeling which has taken place. If it has been Mr. Campbell's happiness to receive in this life that recognition which confessors too often but receive after their death, it is becoming on the part of those who rejoice in the recognition to testify their joy, and to return thanks to those by whom the recognition has been made."

In one of the speeches at his trial, Campbell referred to himself as a thinker born before his time. His words are worth recalling. He said: "It is an awful heresy that would invade the freedom of searching the Word of God by the ministers of the Church; that would teach that because she is *an Established Church* her ministers are to enjoy less liberty when seeking to bring forward, for the edification of their people, from the Word of God things new and old. On this subject I entreat my brethren and fathers to remember this plain fact, that the Church at no time has contained all the light that is in her living Head,—that of the fulness that is in Jesus Christ there has been but a part at any time in His body as a living thing. And unquestionably the Church has to take to herself admonition from the example of the apostle (Phil.

iii. 13): 'This thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward unto those things which are before.' In respect of the Christians to whom he writes, the apostle distinctly recognises that their knowledge is limited, and teaches that it ought to be progressive, expressing his trust that it would be so (ver. 15). What is true of individual Christians is true of the Church as a body; and surely as the Church would admit that an individual Christian was rejecting the express command of the Holy Ghost if he said, 'I shall be satisfied with the knowledge unto which I have attained, and shall not seek to be taught farther,'—she cannot consistently hold that such language would become herself. . . . If a Confession of Faith were something to stint and stop the Church's growth in light and knowledge, and to say, 'Thus far shalt thou go and no farther,' then a Confession of Faith would be the greatest curse that ever befell a Church. Therefore I distinctly hold that no minister treats the Confession of Faith aright if he does not come with it, as a party, to the Word of God, and to acknowledge no other tribunal, in matters of heresy, than the Word of God. In matters of doctrine, no lower authority can be recognised than that of God."[1] This was spoken in 1831. By 1847 the leaven had wrought so effectually that he could say—; "There has been of late a great breaking up of the Calvinism of this country; and not only a preaching of the universality of the Atonement, but a reaction against Calvinism which, like all reactions, has tended to an opposite error; and more especially

[1] *Memorials*, i. 82.

to much that is very superficial and even untrue on the subject of divine teaching and regeneration ; while the recognition of the universality of the Atonement has been unaccompanied by any more spiritual insight into its nature. The persons who have been coming to me had been under this new teaching, and had been coming to feel that it did not meet the deep wants of their being, and in some way had been led to come to our meetings ; and the response which they inwardly felt to what they heard caused them to hope that now they were in the way of receiving what they needed. What it may grow to I know not ; but the people of whom they are a part are many, and doubtless they will be communicating their own experience to their friends."[1]

The questions made prominent in the Row heresy were three—; (1) the Extent of the Atonement ; (2) the Nature of the Divine Pardon ; (3) the place of Assurance in Christian experience. Beginning with the first of these questions, Campbell maintained and taught that the Atonement was of universal extent. The Death of Christ as a Sacrifice for Sin availed for every son of Adam. His words are— ; "I hold and teach that Christ died for all men,—that the propitiation which He made for sin was for all the sins of all mankind,—that those for whom He gave Himself an offering unto God for a sweet-smelling savour were the children of men without exception and without distinction. And this," he added, "the Scriptures teach." Such was the clear statement of his position which he made at his trial. It has a familiar and commonplace sound

[1] *Memorials*, i. 203.

now in the twentieth century, but when first uttered by its intrepid author in the first half of the nineteenth, it startled people as a dangerous and revolutionary doctrine. His conception of the Person of Christ carried with it this large idea of the provision of salvation. According to Campbell, Christ as our elder brother, yea, our fellow-servant, voluntarily submitted Himself to the whole law of God, and therefore could not be supposed to love some of His brethren unto death and not all. "My dear fathers and brethren," he said at his trial, "whom I seek to address as in the feeling of the presence of our Father and our God, I ask you whether you do not all believe that Christ fulfilled the righteous law of God?—; whether you do not all believe that Christ came under that law, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul, heart, mind, and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself? I ask you, then, *whether you do not believe that Christ did love His neighbour as Himself?* And I ask you whether you believe that *He Himself has taught us* to regard *every human being as our neighbours?* And do you not believe that the man Christ Jesus did love every human being, as a man—I say as a righteous man—as a man fulfilling the righteous law of God? If, then, the righteous man Christ Jesus did love every human being, and if the mind of Christ is the mind of God, surely it follows—alas! that any should wish anything else to follow—it follows that God loveth every human being. I ask, then, how did Christ express His love and show that He loved every man as Himself? Was it not by His deeds?—was it not by His dying as well as by all

His other doings that He set forth His love? If, then, Christ loved all, and if thus it appears that God loved all—, and if Christ's actings expressed His love, which is God's love to all, then this great act of humbling Himself to the death, even the death of the Cross, this great act must be expressive of the love of Christ to all men, and therefore of the love of God to all men."[1]

The same generous conclusion is reached when he considers Christ in His sovereign and judicial capacities. Christ as King and Judge of mankind must needs have made atonement for all men. When Scripture says, *The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son*, the reason is because Christ hath done something for all men, even died for them. Christ's right to judge them, according to Campbell, springs from His having bought them with a price. Take away His love for all manifested in His sufferings for all, and you take away all reason for His being exalted as their judge. At the Day of Judgment the only sin that will condemn men will be their continued rejection of Christ. The condemnation of the Father will no man incur, but only *the wrath of the Lamb*.

On these and other grounds Campbell argued for a universal provision of Atonement, and thus summed up—; "On these grounds, therefore, do I hold the doctrine of universal Atonement to be the doctrine of Scripture, namely, That there is not one word pointedly or distinctly limiting the Atonement,—that there are many expressions distinctly averring that the work of Christ has been for *all men*,—that the appointing Him King of Zion and ordaining a media-

[1] *Proof*, p. 182.

torial kingdom in His hand are announced as good news to *all men*,—that the various forms in which this gospel of the kingdom is preached contain internal evidence that Christ died for all,—that the footing on which the call to repentance is addressed to sinners is the manifested love of God in Christ to them,—that the ground on which the obligation to love our brethren is put, is the love of God in Christ, and the call to prayer for them is founded on Christ's having given Himself a ransom for all,—that the judgment to come, both in respect of a resurrection of men for judgment, of the principle of the judgment, and of His title to judge, before whose judgment-seat *all* must stand, teach the same doctrine,—and, finally, that it is implied in the statements of the Scripture on the subject of election." [1]

Turning to the next matter in dispute, the subject of a universal pardon, he distinguished between the different senses of pardon. Pardon may mean (1) an act of absolute and unconditional amnesty declared to all men and bestowed upon them irrespective of their moral character; (2) the act of God when He receives a sinner back unto Himself; (3) a removal of the judicial barrier interposed by man's guilt, so that the fact of his sinfulness presents now no obstacle in the way of his return to God. Now, Campbell utterly repudiated the first of these descriptions of pardon; he said: "To neither unbeliever nor believer is any immunity from future wrath secured *apart* from his being prepared for being found of God in peace at that day in which He shall judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ." [2] As regards pardon in the second sense, no one at the

[1] *Case*, p. 31.

[2] *Case*, p. 33.

time made it the subject of dispute. In this second sense Campbell did not hold pardon to be universal, for the reason that all have not repented and turned to God. But in the third sense of pardon he did hold it to be universal: not that all men are delivered from wrath to come, but that they are redeemed from the curse of sin, delivered from the penalty of the law, and placed under terms of grace. "In this sense," he said, "I do hold—and in this sense I teach the doctrine of universal pardon through the death of Christ. For such a pardon I believe the Scriptures to reveal as extended to all—as the result of the atoning sacrifice of Christ for all—as the fruit of His propitiation for the sins of the world—as the condition in which God's accepting the sacrifice of Christ for mankind has placed the children of men: and," he went on to say, "if it be this doctrine that the libel designates as 'universal pardon through the death of Christ,' I deny the relevancy of the libel in respect of it, with reference to the Scriptures, holding it to be altogether beyond controversy that this is the doctrine of the Word of God."[1]

What he here avowed as his belief did not amount to the old doctrine of Arminius, that God is ready to save and pardon all men on condition of their repenting and receiving the gospel. He explicitly guarded himself against being so understood. "No two doctrines," said he, "can be more widely different. Arminianism is the sanctifying with the name of religion pure self-righteousness. After a man is supposed to have repented and believed on that system, he is only then in that condition of *right to*

[1] *Case*, p. 35.

come to God with confidence, in which, according to the true doctrine of the Scriptures, he was placed by the Sacrifice of Christ, as a propitiation for his sins; and as long as repenting and believing occupy in men's minds this place of *preliminary requisites*, in order to have *title* to approach God with boldness, of confidence in His Fatherly love to us and free acceptance of us, it makes little difference whether we *professedly* hold the system known by the name of *Arminianism*, or attempt to separate between ourselves and it by limiting the Atonement and by holding strictly that the faith and the repentance are the gifts of God."[1]

Campbell's insistence on assurance as an essential of Christian experience was another article of contention between him and current theology, as it had been with the Marrow men before his day. It was involved in his doctrine of grace. Assurance was a corollary to universal pardon. On limited theories of Atonement, assurance had no such place as he gave it. On such theories you could be *assured* of the truth of God's word, not of a personal love for each and all of mankind. On Campbell's doctrine of grace you were bound to go thus far. According to that doctrine, all men were entitled to feel sure of God's love to them personally, irrespective of who and what they were. This was more, on the one hand, than being sure that God's word was true; on the other hand, it was less than assurance of personal salvation. Campbell described it as *the assurance of faith*. "It is no doubt, when abounding in the assurance of faith, that, if the eye turns inwardly, and the thoughts are directed to

[1] *Case*, p. 36.

our own state, we shall also enjoy the assurance of being in a state of salvation ; but still the two assurances are distinct in themselves, and I at present feel it to be important to refer to the distinction, because, whilst I hold assurance to be of the essence of faith, I do not hold that the converted person is necessarily *always* in a condition of assurance as to his being in a state of salvation ; inasmuch as I do not hold it to be impossible for a converted person to be, *at times*, so overcome of the temptations of Satan, causing darkness, through the flesh, as it may be to stand in doubt of the first principles of the oracles of God ; and it is manifest that, if brought into such darkness and such unbelief, there must be the interruption to the blessed consciousness of being a child of God and an heir of glory."[1]

That it is our duty as well as our privilege to feel certain of God's love to ourselves personally, that the certainty of this is an essential accompaniment of true and intelligent faith, was a position from which, however denied by the great mass of his countrymen, Campbell seems never to have swerved. Thirty years after being condemned for maintaining it, its power over him is still seen from some remarks that he makes on the agnostic verses of the poet A. H. Clough. Writing to his friend Erskine of Linlathen, he says : " I have lately had my attention directed to Clough's poems (by Mr. Shairp), and have felt in them—though in a philosophic garb—the instinctive impatience of the doctrine of assurance which we were so familiar with thirty years ago, in minds differing widely in respect of religion ; some serious, some careless, some Calvinistic,

[1] *Case*, p. 49.

some Arminian; but which were alike in this, that they knew not that they knew the living God. I say, "knew not that they knew"; for I believe that some know God more truly than they know that they know."[1]

He proclaimed the doctrine of universal atonement and the necessity for the peace and joy of assurance, with all the warm zeal of a Church Father contending for the faith once delivered to the saints. To his clear spiritual vision these were matters that were great and cardinal. To deny or doubt that God loved every individual man to the extent of sending His Son to die for them, was in his view to be guilty of the arch-heresy of denying that God Himself was love. To put any limitations to the extent of Divine grace was tantamount to a denial of it. For God to love some of His creatures and to pass by others, were to represent Him as capable of caprice and devoid of love. In like manner, to require from believers in God the assurance of faith, was in his opinion the most natural and reasonable duty. It was but saying that they that know His name should put their trust in Him, should have peace through believing, should rejoice because the Lord had done great things for them.

In support of his contention, he cited the Fathers of the Church and the Confession of Faith. He quoted to his accusers the words of the old Scottish Confession of 1560: "Regeneration is wrocht be the power of the Holy Ghost working in the hartes of the elect of God *ane assured faith* in the *promise* of God reveiled to us in his word, by whilk faith we apprehend Christ Jesus with the graces and benefits promised in him."

[1] *Memorials*, ii. 27.

He quoted to them the words of Patrick Hamilton, the Scottish Reformer: "And they that believe not that their sins are forgiven them, and that they shall be saved for Christ's sake, they believe not the gospel." He claimed to have the holy and learned Boston with him in these views. Boston had written in his Notes to *The Marrow of Modern Divinity:* "And the doctrine of assurance or an appropriating persuasion in saving faith, as it is the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, Rom. x. 9; Acts xv. 11; Gal. ii. 20; so it is a Protestant doctrine, taught by Protestant divines against the Papists; sealed with the blood of Martyrs, in Popish flames: it is the doctrine of Reformed Churches abroad and the doctrine of the Church of Scotland." An eminent Scottish divine, Dr. Colquhoun of Leith, had said, treating of assurance: "There are two different kinds of assurance, the assurance of *faith* and the assurance of *sense*. The former kind belongs to the *essence* of faith. It is *essential* to saving faith, and is nothing but faith itself." Again, "This particular trust or confidence in the Saviour for Salvation is what our Reformers from Popery called the *assurance of faith;* and *by it* they usually describe saving faith." "For my part, I am utterly at a loss to know what trusting in the Saviour for Salvation can mean, unless it means my *trusting that He will perform the part of a Saviour to me.*"[1]

It is now time to turn to the arguments employed against Campbell. These, it will be easily understood, though sufficient to bring in a verdict against him, were such as would hardly be listened to now. Not unscholarly in a sense, or utterly without cogency and

[1] *Case*, p. 65.

reason, they were mainly irrelevant to the subject in hand. Thus the idea of a universal atonement was met by a flat denial. Scripture, it was alleged, nowhere countenanced the idea. The statements of Scripture that seemed to favour the idea could all be explained away. "These statements," it was said, "are very general, and it must be taken into consideration that the Scriptures are not a dry philosophical treatise. The great part of the statements of Scripture on religious doctrine are interwoven with history; and it must be borne in mind that the persons to whom the first intimations of the gospel were dictated, and by them published to the world, were labouring under a strong national prejudice, reluctant to admit the Gentiles into the bosom of the Church; and strong language was necessary to show the wide extent of the evangelical administration,—that it was a universal and not a partial one. But there are statements which seem to limit it. Our Saviour says that He came into the world not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for *many*—"This is My blood shed for *many* for the remission of sins."[1]

The doctrine of assurance, again, for which Campbell was condemned, was not, as he was at pains again and again to show, the doctrine which he held and taught, namely, the *assurance of faith*. His opponents imputed to him a doctrine of assurance which he firmly repudiated, namely, the assurance of personal salvation, and condemned him accordingly under the Act of 1720, which, as we have seen, the Moderate party of

[1] *Proof*, p. 240.

that time passed in order to suppress the teaching of the Marrow theology.

By these methods Campbell was condemned, partly by the employment of arguments that were not relevant, and by accusing him of views which he did not hold, and partly because his message was unacceptable and unintelligible to men obstinately attached to a form of Calvinism that Calvin himself would have repudiated. Thus was he cast out from a religious communion in which his fathers and he had been reared, and in which they were conspicuously gifted servants. It was a sad day for him, for he loved his Church well, and never lifted up a stone against her to the end. But while it was a sad day for him, it was a humbling one for the Church that now flung from her bosom her loyal and gracious son. The Church has long since regretted her folly; but the error could not be undone. She has found no place for repentance, though she may have sought it with tears.

1. Looking at the *Row heresy* at the distance of seventy years, one sees a great deal in it that did not stand out at the time, notably the Act of Assembly under which the trial took place. It is referred to in the major proposition of the libel in these terms: "The doctrine of universal atonement and pardon through the death of Christ, as also the doctrine that assurance is of the essence of faith and necessary to salvation, are contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and to the Confession of Faith, approven by the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland and ratified by law in the year 1690: and were, moreover, condemned by the 5th Act of the General Assembly, held in the

year 1720, as being directly opposed to the Word of God and to the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the Church of Scotland."

It has been pointed out how the Act of 1720 came into force, how it was drawn up in haste by men who aimed at suppressing the new evangelicalism of their day, the *Marrow* theology; how it condemned the book from which the new evangelicalism drew its inspiration as contrary to Scripture and the Confession of Faith; how it prohibited the Clergy from recommending the book, and even required them to warn their flocks against reading it.

Now this Act of Assembly that did all this never became a law of the Church, although in Campbell's time it was employed in that character. At the most, it was a decision of Assembly in a particular case: not even a Declaratory Act giving new expression to the sense in which the Church interpreted her old standards; but only a declaration of the sense in which the Assembly of 1720 interpreted—most people would now say misinterpreted—the teaching of a particular book. Before it could attain the force and authority of a law of the Church, it would have required to pass down to Presbyteries under the *Barrier Act*, one of the wisest safeguards of freedom enjoyed by the Church. The terms of the Barrier Act are worth recalling here. They provide, "That before any General Assembly of this Church shall pass any Acts which are to be *binding rules and constitutions* to the Church, the same Acts be first proposed as overtures to the Assembly, and being by them passed as such, be remitted to the consideration of the several Presbyteries

of this Church, and their opinions and consent reported by their Commissioners to the next General Assembly following, who may then pass the same in Acts, *if the more general opinion of the Church thus had agreed thereunto.*"

Had the Act of 1720, under which Campbell was tried and condemned, passed the various stages of this wise Barrier Act, it would have been exalted to the rank of a Law of the Church, and Campbell's trial under it would have been just and competent. As it was, his trial was neither. Moreover, from the days of Thomas Boston to those of Dr. Andrew Thomson, as Story of Rosneath pointed out in his powerful defence of Campbell, some of the most respected authorities in the Church, including Boston and Dr. Andrew Thomson themselves, had regarded the Act 1720 as a blot on the Church's character. When it was originally passed, as we have seen in a preceding chapter, all the most learned evangelical divines of the day offered it an ineffectual resistance, headed by Boston and Ebenezer Erskine. They showed, although all in vain, that the teaching that the Act condemned had been maintained by all Reformed divines in this country and on the Continent, and that some of the sentences of the condemned book that gave greatest offence to the then leaders of the General Assembly were the *ipsissima verba* of Luther himself. Fraser of Brea, a *nomen præclarum* in Scottish theology, had taught a twofold destination of the Atonement; one restricted to the elect, the other coextensive with the human race. As Campbell had not gone farther than this, his friends thought it

right to make Fraser's position known, which was done by Erskine of Linlathen, who published extracts from Fraser's work in support of the Row opinions.

Campbell then suffered—and suffered illegally—under the Act that condemned the evangelicalism of the eighteenth century; and it need not be said that for that Act he had the same cordial disrespect that all evangelical divines in Scotland have ever entertained. He gave expression to this in his own gentle manner: "The Act of 1720 I regard with regret," he said, "and as a minister of this Church have cause to be humbled on account of it."[1] Probably in this direction we are to find an explanation of the extraordinary fact already pointed out, that out of an Assembly of over three hundred members only one hundred and twenty-five took part in the fatal vote. The great majority of the members were certainly not favourable to Campbell's views, but they were evidently as honestly opposed to condemning him under the disgraceful Act 1720. At the same time it was not to their credit that they silently acquiesced in a decision arrived at by wrongful and unjust means.

2. Although Campbell had the honour of suffering on grounds similar to those on which the evangelical party of the eighteenth century were condemned, it must not be supposed that he was a mere modern Marrow man. His views more resemble Amyraldism, a system belonging to the seventeenth century, that deserves more than a passing notice. This system derived its name from its author, Moses Amyraut, a French theologian who did much to modify and

[1] *Case* (xxvi.).

liberalise the dogmatic Calvinism of his day. Amyraut held the Calvinistic doctrines of predestination and the Divine decree, but joined on to them a doctrine of universal salvation through the sacrifice of Christ offered up for all. God's will and desire are that all should be saved. So far grace and pardon are universal, and they are unconditional. But in the result they are not universal but particular, reaching those only who do not reject them. As Calvinism interprets the divine intentions from an observation of the results of salvation, Amyraldism argues in an inverse order from God's goodness and love to His creatures, to His desire and intention towards them, and draws the inferences therefrom of a universal provision of salvation. Amyraut's ideas created great excitement in the Reformed Churches of France, Holland, and Switzerland, and the consequent divisions were sharp though not relentless. According to one party, Amyraut had Scripture on his side and was altogether in the right. But this party was opposed by the logicians, who contended that what God did not accomplish it could not be said that He willed and intended, and that universalism founded on impossible conditions was no more productive of the results of salvation than was the hardest form of particularism. No such extreme measures, however, were resorted to as in Campbell's case. The French Church in its National Synod of 1659 declared Amyraut's universalism to be purely ideal and academic, and therefore to be tolerated. The Scottish Calvinists, on the other hand, although they did not reason against the new views with the vigour with which Rivet,

Spanheim, and Peter Du Moulin did, had probably a more accurate perception of their tendency. They saw a danger attending the toleration of even ideal and academic universalism that their abler French predecessors saw not, namely, that of advancing to a universalism which, as Schaff says, "turns conversion into a process of nature and dulls the edge of warning," and is inconsistent with the possession of human freedom, a possession which "implies the continued power of resistance."

3. It ought not to be forgotten that Campbell brought much of the trouble on himself by his persistent use of terms such as "pardon," in a loose and misleading sense. His manner of using that term landed him constantly in misunderstanding. He employed it to describe the state of pardonableness in which the atoning death of Christ has necessarily and unconditionally placed every sinner of mankind. God has, he persisted in saying, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, absolutely and unconditionally pardoned every sinner of mankind. Questioned as to what he really meant by this declaration, he replied that he meant only that God had removed the barrier that stands in the way of the sinner returning to Himself. Campbell was not careful enough in his use of terms. Granting that some most substantial benefits have accrued to the race through Christ's eternal relationship to it and His interposition in its behalf,—preservation in life, mitigation of the curse of sin, an open door for the sinner's return to God,—we cannot speak of such benefits or any others that may be secured to the whole race of mankind as

equivalent to the remission of sins. Carlyle, Campbell's counsel in the case, waved aside this objection, on the ground that his client's meaning was clearly and repeatedly explained in the evidence. But Story of Rosneath had a finer discrimination of the value of words, and did not hesitate to take his friend to task on the subject. Speaking of his use of the term "pardon," he said, "The term itself I have no hesitation in unreservedly and unequivocally condemning, as fitted to mislead, as not framed to give right conceptions of the truth, either in the Scriptures or the standards. But the truth must not suffer although arrayed in an unseemly garment."[1] Surely not, but Campbell certainly suffered from the construction put upon his words by his opponents. They seldom credited him with holding the doctrine of universal pardon in the restricted sense which he claimed. On the contrary, they usually attributed to his words a meaning that he always repudiated. For this his peculiar phraseology was to a large extent unfortunately responsible.

4. It is an interesting point how far the first of Campbell's universals—the doctrine of universal atonement—may be honestly read into—it cannot be read out of—the Westminster Confession of Faith. In his later days Campbell seemed inclined to doubt whether it could be honestly read into it. Writing to a friend, thirty years after his deposition, he said, "Although I felt it right, seeing ground for so thinking, to state reasons for concluding that the word 'redemption' was not used by the Westminster Assembly in the

[1] *Case*, p. 94.

sense in which holding *redemption limited* was a *limiting of the atonement*, I was at pains to make it clear that I stood simply on the truth of my teaching,—its *harmony with the Scriptures*. I did not, indeed, then see the subject of election as I now see it; otherwise I must have recognised a pointed contradiction of a part of my faith, as contained in the Westminster Confession."[1]

A story told by A. J. Scott (a licentiate of the Church of Scotland when Campbell's trial was proceeding, and deprived of his licence as a preacher of the gospel by the Assembly that deposed Campbell, for teaching similar views) ascribes this opinion to him at the time. The two kindred spirits were in the Assembly hearkening to each other's condemnation. At the close of Scott's condemnation they moved homeward together, and as they paced the silent streets of the old city in pensive melancholy, an interesting confession took place. The story is best given in Scott's own words. "After that dreary night in the Assembly, the dawn breaking upon us as we returned at length, alike condemned, to our lodging in the new town of Edinburgh, I turned round and looked on my companion's face under the pale light, and asked him, 'Could you sign the Confession now?' His answer was 'No.' The Assembly was right. Our doctrine and the Confession are incompatible."[2]

Some allowance must be made for the depressing circumstances in which the friends stood at the moment when Campbell is said to have thus declared himself beaten. Something, too, must be de-

[1] *Memorials*, ii. 34. [2] Erskine's *Letters*, p. 106.

ducted from a confession wrung from a gentle spirit by a somewhat commanding nature like that of Scott. Although he may have assented to the latter's view of the Westminster Standards, that they shut the door against ideas of universal atonement, Campbell argued for these ideas and for their toleration under the Standards in such a manner as to raise these Standards in the estimation of the world to the rank of liberally conceived and wisely comprehensive documents. He interpreted their careful clauses by the light of historical knowledge that has stood the test of time, and that has been confirmed by the most recent apologists for them. Campbell's argument was that, although the Confession affirmed the redemption by Christ to be particular, it said nothing regarding a particular work of atonement. According to his reading of the matter, the Confession has significantly refrained from limiting the death of Christ to the Elect only. The latest orthodox defender of the Confession apparently agrees with Campbell on this point. He says, "The statement in our Confession is cautiously expressed. It is simply an anticipation of the doctrine of effectual calling. It really leaves untouched the question of the worth of Christ's work, which is surely in itself infinite, and, thus viewed in its essential worth, abundantly sufficient to satisfy the justice of God for the sins of the whole world."[1]

It is known that there were members of the Westminster Assembly who held and advocated views of the Atonement almost identical with those of Macleod

[1] Macpherson's *Handbook*, p. 77.

Campbell. Calamy was one of these. "I am far from universal redemption in the Arminian sense," he said; "but that that I hold is in the sense of our divines in the Synod of Dort, that Christ did pay a price for all,—absolute intention for the elect, conditional intention for the reprobate in case they do believe." "These views," says the Confession's apologist just quoted, "were not recognised, and certainly they got no place in the Confession; yet that formula was so framed that Calamy and his party found no difficulty in accepting it. The opinion of the great majority of members was undoubtedly in favour of what we call, in the strictest sense of the term, the doctrine of a limited atonement, that Christ died for the elect only; yet even the express statement (iii. 6), that the elect alone are saved by Christ, is not so put as necessarily to offend the evangelical men, who demand an unchallengeable ground for the unrestricted offer of salvation."[1] Another authority on the subject, Dr. Mitchell, says, "Those who in modern times have pronounced most confidently, that the more restricted view is exclusively intended, seem to me to have unconsciously construed or interpreted the words, 'neither are any other redeemed by Christ effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only,' as if they had run, 'neither are any other redeemed by Christ, or effectually called, or justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.' But these two statements do not necessarily bear the same meaning. Calamy, Arrowsmith, and the others who agreed with them, may have

[1] Macpherson's *Handbook*, p. 25.

felt justified in accepting the former, though they might have scrupled to accept the latter."[1]

From these authorities on the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the standard by which Campbell was professedly tried, it appears that that venerable symbol of the faith has not committed itself on the subject of the value or extent of the Redeemer's death. The matter is untouched, or at the most expressed cautiously, according to Macpherson and Mitchell, and for this good reason, that the Confession was intended to promote the union of Christians and not their separation. It is interesting to remember that at the time of his trial Campbell propounded his views on this point in language that almost anticipates that of the authorities just named. Speaking concerning the Confession's statement, "Christ, by His obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to His Father's justice in their behalf," he said: "Now, you will remember that where redemption is spoken of it is not merely said, positively, that the elect are redeemed, but, negatively, that none else are; but here where the *death of Christ* is spoken of there is no negative. But if the negative, where redemption is spoken of, had referred to the death of Christ, it would naturally have been introduced here, which, indeed, was its fittest place; and that, when they are speaking pointedly about the death of Christ for the elect, they do not say it was for the elect *alone*, is not without a meaning. The real history of this choice of language seems to be, that

[1] *Introduction to Minutes of Westminster Assembly*, p. 57.

inasmuch as there were many men in that Assembly who were opposed to the universality of the Atonement (which, alas! is matter of historical truth not to be denied)—, and inasmuch, on the other hand, as there were many who held that doctrine, that there was no farther liberty taken with the articles of the Church, which they were revising, neither was there any farther compromise resorted to for the purpose of securing that harmony, with special reference to which they were met, than their observing silence on the subject of the extent of the Atonement."

[1] *Proof*, p. 213.

CHAPTER IX

THE RISE OF MORISONIANISM

AUTHORITIES

The Life of Principal Morison. By W. Adamson, D.D. Lond. 1898.

Principal James Morison. By Oliphant Smeaton. Edin. 1901.

History of the Evangelical Union. By Fergus Ferguson. Glasg. 1876.

History of Congregational Independency in Scotland. By James Ross. Glasg. 1900.

The Extent of the Propitiation. By James Morison. Lond. 1847.

OF the movement now to engage our attention, nothing is truer than that it was the genuine offspring of its age. During the thirties of last century the Legislatures of our country were made to recognise the rights of man as they had never done before. In politics the long night of privilege was far spent, and the dawn of a new era was beginning to appear. Old social standards of measurement and old economical doctrines, such as that the many existed for the benefit of the few, were showing signs of breaking up. The voice of the poor and the needy was making itself heard, and their demands for justice and redress were receiving attention. We have but to remember the activity of Parliament during that and the preceding decade—the Catholic Emancipation

measure of 1829; the Reform Bill of 1832; the Abolition of Slavery within the British Colonies in 1833; the Poor Law of 1834; the restoration of the rights of municipalities in the year following, and the foundation of a system of national education in 1839—to see how the aspirations of the nation were tending, and how humanitarian sentiment was finding expression. Brotherhood, equality, and fair-play were clamouring loudly at every closed door, and refusing to be turned away. A corresponding claim, quite independent of politics, was being made in the name of Christian theology. Here also it was demanded that doors of privilege be thrown open. The conception of a God who maintained His Church and provided redemption for the favoured few was being declared an intolerable anachronism. Freedom for all, food for all, education for all, and salvation for all, were now coming to be the national watchwords.

At such crises in the history of a nation the forward advance has generally been brought about by a leader of commanding personality. Others may co-operate in the preparation of the way; they may dig the trenches and bring the army on the field to the point of attack, but *his* decisive action storms the citadel, and his sword accomplishes the victory. There were preachers of the three *universalities* before James Morison, some of them even within the small sect that cast him forth from its midst; but the honour of victory was his who made them current coin. What emboldened him to work and suffer for the propagation of his condemned opinions, was the wonderful spiritual results that ever followed their proclamation. Could he doubt the soundness of his views when he saw them

instrumental in the conversion of multitudes? Like another Wesley, although within narrower limits, he went forth on itinerary preaching tours from 1840 to 1844; and revivals invariably followed as the result of his preaching. Confirmed in his beliefs by such tokens of the Divine presence, he and his followers sought to influence a wider public than they could reach by the spoken appeal. Religious journalism, now so popular and influential, commenced its great career at that time, and one of the weekly journals then started, the *Christian News*, still flourishes. It is the oldest religious paper in Scotland.

Among the views for which, in 1841, Morison, then a minister of the United Secession in Kilmarnock, was arraigned before the Church Courts, were the following: That the object of saving faith is the statement that Christ made atonement for the sins of the person invited to believe, as He made atonement for the sins of the whole world; that those to whom the gospel is preached are under no natural inability to believe, or to put away unbelief, the only obstacle to salvation which the Atonement had not removed; that no person ought to be directed to pray for grace to help him to believe, even though he were an anxious sinner; and that no person's prayers could be of any avail till he believed unto salvation, which believing must immediately give the knowledge that the person is saved; that repentance in Scripture meant only a change of mind, and was not godly sorrow for sin; that justification is not pardon, but is implied in pardon; that God pardons only in His character of Father, and justifies only in the character of Judge,

and that justification is the expression of the fatherly favour of God; that election comes in the order of nature after the Atonement. Morison was also charged with publishing expressions unscriptural, unwarrantable, and calculated to depreciate the Atonement. On the subject of Original Sin, it was alleged that he was not prepared to say that all men by nature are deserving of the punishment of death, temporal, spiritual, and eternal, on account of Adam's sin.

After an excited discussion of these views, the Kilmarnock Presbytery decided to "admonish Mr. Morison, and suspend him from the exercise of his ministry and the fellowship of the Church; aye and until he retract his errors and express his sorrow for the offence given to the brethren in the Church by the propagation of these errors." In dignified tones Morison replied, "I need not say how deeply I am pained by the decision to which my fathers and brethren have come." A leading citizen of the town retorted with less dignity, "Moderator, Mr. Morison has protested in his own name against the decision that has just been reached, but I protest in the name of the commissioners and of the congregation. It will be left, however, to the congregation to say whether they will appeal to the Synod or not. But, friends, I counsel you to let the Presbytery depart in peace. As a people we have been much tried by them in the past, and they have often met here; but this is the last time they will ever meet in Clerk's Lane Church."

When the case came before the Synod in Glasgow the same year, it created intense excitement. A newspaper of the day said, "In so far as the interests of

the Secession Church and of religion generally are concerned, a more important cause was never before tried in Scotland." The decision of the lower Court was confirmed, and Morison was cut off from the Church of his fathers. He received the sentence with remarkable composure, and contented himself with the memorable remark, "Sooner shall my right hand forget its cunning, and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, than that this decision shall prevent me from preaching the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ. Seeing the Supreme Court of the United Secession Church has passed sentence against me, even to suspension from the exercise of my ministry, and that on most unjust grounds, as I conceive, I protest against the decision, and I will hold myself at liberty to maintain and preach the same doctrines as if no such decision had been come to." It is right to state it was with anything but a light heart that some of the United Secession fathers condemned Morison.

One of the most respected of them, Dr. Heugh, though he took a leading part in that unhappy day's work, remarked to Principal Harper, "We have this day cut off from us the ablest of our younger men, and one who need never have left us had his honesty not been in excess of his worldly wisdom." Another who was out and out against Morison's expulsion was his old professor, Dr. John Brown. He might well have been unwilling to condemn his former pupil, as it was currently reported he held similar views. Indeed, he ran no small risk of being libelled for heresy himself. Dr. Brown made a powerful speech in defence of the youthful "heretic," but it was of no avail.

Morison entertained no feeling of resentment towards his ecclesiastical prosecutors. He went home to his lodging easier in mind than the men who brought about his overthrow. "How have things gone?" said his young wife, to whom he had been married between the trial of the case at the Presbytery and this meeting of Synod; he replied, "All is well." A little company of sympathisers were gathered in the room which he now entered. He asked them to join him in prayer. All knelt down devoutly, and the first words of Morison's prayer were, "Father in heaven forgive them; for they know not what they do."

The result of Morison's deposition was the rise of a new denomination in Scotland, popularly, but not unkindly, known as the *Morisonian Church*, which came into existence two days before the eventful Disruption of 1843. The *Evangelical Union* body, to give it its proper name, arose as a reaction from extreme Calvinism, and a protest against the doctrine of necessity and unconditional election to grace. Its positive creed is summed up in three articles: the love of God the Father in the gift and sacrifice of Jesus to *all men everywhere*, without distinction, exception, or respect of persons. The love of God the Son, in the gift and sacrifice of Himself as a true propitiation for the sins of *all the world*. The love of God the Holy Spirit, in His present and continuous work of applying to the souls *of all men* the provisions of Divine Grace. It has been said that at first Morison and his friends did not contemplate the setting up of an independent sect; but the logic of events proved too strong for them, and it is difficult to see how their important

mission to the evangelical Churches of Christendom could otherwise have been accomplished as satisfactorily as has been the case. Since 1897 the "Morisonians" have been united with the "Independents"; but considerably before that date it was given to Dr. Morison, then a venerable and universally respected divine, to see the principles for which he had suffered, tolerated, and the denomination which he had founded when he was a young man of twenty-seven years of age, satisfactorily completing its providential purpose.

Dr. Morison, though he maintained a strenuous battle all his life against Calvinism, resembled Calvin in one respect most closely. Like the great Genevan divine, he excelled as an expositor of Scripture, and his most enduring work is his Commentaries on several books of the Bible. As a theologian, the Hamiltonian philosophy influenced him as it did so many others of his time, stimulating him by its challenges and its negations to discover a solid ground for the Faith in knowledge and intelligence. Accordingly, we never find him lowering the claim of theology to be regarded as a science, even the queen of sciences; nor had he much sympathy with the pseudo-liberal school who scoffed at creed and dogma. "What is the use of belonging to a Church at all, if you do not know its specific articles of belief?" he was in the habit of saying to those who were yielding to the spirit of religious and theological supineness. A powerful controversialist, as his appearance in the lists against the Edwardian system at the time proved, he had all a philosopher's distaste for wrangling and disputa-

tion. That he should have been so frequently obliged to accoutre himself for war, in defence of his views, seems strange to us now, to whom these views are so familiar and reasonable. "The Atonement Controversy," as the trial of Morison's views was at the time called, brought forth such expressions of them as this: "The Atonement is not pardon, but a something on the ground of which all sins and sinners may be pardoned; not deliverance from the condemnation of the law, but a something on the ground of which all who are under the law may be accepted and treated by God as if they were as righteous as Jesus Himself; not redemption, but a something on the ground of which every miserable captive of Satan may for ever be emancipated from his accursed slavery; not reconciliation, but a something calculated to slay the bitterest enmity of the wickedest heart out of hell." It was a notable service to the faith to broaden the mind of a time that would not acquiesce in a doctrinal statement so noble and so reasonable.

The service of Dr. Morison to the cause of religious progress received ample though tardy recognition in his own lifetime. In 1882, Glasgow University made him a Doctor of Divinity, an honour of a similar kind having been conferred on him twenty years earlier from a foreign University. In 1889, theologians from the Colonies, America, and several continental seats of learning met along with the citizens of Glasgow to do him honour, —a meeting that was remarkable for the presence of Dr. Cairns, the leading representative of the Church that forty-eight years previously had cast him out.

Towards the close of his life, two thousand influential ministers and laymen of that Church presented him with an address, making what reparation they could for the sentence of their fathers fifty years before. This change of attitude must have been a proud gratification to Dr. Morison.

The animus to which, in that same city, his theological opinions had subjected him, may be guessed from the following agonising utterances found in the preface to his Commentary on Romans, published in 1849. It is entitled an Epistle dedicatory to the Professors of Theology in the Established and Non-Established Churches in Scotland: "Possibly also," he says, "an intenser flame of intellect might have glowed from my pages . . . had not my spirit, day by day, week by week, month after month, and year after year, been subjected to influences of a peculiarly chilling and ardour-quenching description. Is it needful that I become to you the historiographer of these influences? Do not even those who are only strangers in Scotland know that the very name which I bear has been metamorphosed into a byword, and tossed about from seacoast to seacoast as a favourite football of reproach? Do not the least observant in society take notice of the fact, that almost every weakling in theology who sees it needful to become valiant in defence of those tenets which have affixed to them the superscription of the Genevese divine, aspires to establish his credit for theological prowess by fearlessly adventuring to give a trenchant thrust into the sides of the ideas which that class delight to brand with the ignominy of my name. . . . When

you take into account, then, that it is not possible that such things as these could happen without having conjoined with them insultation of my person, misrepresentation of my tenets, calumniation of my character, and defamation of my motives,—you may form some idea of the wintry influences that have been, for many summers and winters together, and therefore during the entire progress of my literary labour in the work before you, streaming in upon the fervour of my spirit."

A specimen of the influences referred to in the foregoing extract may be given to illustrate the standpoint of Morison's critics during the early days of "Morisonianism." A controversialist of the narrow school, appropriately called Gall, had issued a pamphlet under the title, "Wherein the Morisonians are Wrong." It was composed in defence of the Carrubber's Close Mission, which had excluded members of Evangelical Union Churches from co-operation in Christian work. Gall contended that Morisonianism gave no safeguard for the sinner's trust, as it put Christ's work in place of Christ Himself,—that is, a doctrine in place of a Redeemer. As a rejoinder, Dr. Morison published another pamphlet, entitled "Wherein the Morisonians are not Wrong but Wronged," which had the effect of making Gall and his friends rescind their "boycott" of the Morisonian party.

So far all ended well enough; but the brand of suspicion which the orthodox Churches in Scotland put on Morison and his followers stuck to them up till within a few years of their leader's death in

1893. Perhaps the most interesting encounter in which this powerful preacher of a universal atonement took part, was when he took Dr. Candlish to task for his comments on the text, "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Candlish, in his volume on *The Atonement*, had denied that that passage contained any general or universal reference of the Atonement to all mankind. Morison issued a reply to this volume, with the title, "Vindication of the Universality of the Atonement," in which, referring to the restricted interpretation put on the phrase "the whole world," he asked—; "If that expression could really be so dwarfed as to embrace only 'all brethren in Christ,' then what will Dr. Candlish, we would ask, make of the apostle's statement in the only other passage in which the same expression is found? What will he make of chapter v. 19: 'We know that we are of God, *and the whole world lieth in wickedness*'? Will he in that case too, suppose that the apostle refers to believers only?"

Morison's *Vindication* gave the death-blow in Scotland to all theological defences of a limited atonement. Dr. Candlish was the last of his race, and even he seems to have come round to the universalist view, judging by a passage found in the preface to the second edition of "The Fatherhood of God." Commenting on the verses already quoted (1 John ii. 1, 2), Dr. Candlish now wrote: "The possibility of a child of God sinning is assumed. . . . And now it is intimated that when he sins, he has no other propitiation on which to fall back but that which is common to all—

that which is available for the entire race of mankind. If any one of those who are sons commit sin, he transgresses the law. And he has nothing for it but to have recourse anew, as the whole world may have recourse, to that atoning work of Christ which deals with all sin, his sin and the world's sin, in exactly the same way." It was for such expressions as these, written in 1865 and received with general favour, that Morison had to leave the ministry of the United Secession Church.

CHAPTER X

THE *SCOTCH SERMONS*

AUTHORITIES

Scotch Sermons. Lond. 1880.
General Assembly Debates. 1881.
Caird's *Fundamental Ideas of Christianity.* Glasg. 1899.
Salvation Here and Hereafter. By John Service. Lond. 1877.

A VOLUME bearing the title "Scotch Sermons" appeared in 1880, which, though destined soon to be forgotten,—the fate of most sermons,—furnished a lively subject of debate at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1881. It was under the editorship of Professor Knight of St. Andrews, and among the more notable contributors were Principal Caird, Dr. Story, and Dr. John Cunningham of Crieff. It "originated in the wish to gather together a few specimens of a style of teaching which increasingly prevails amongst the clergy of the Scottish Church." The sermons were further described in the Preface as "the work of those whose hope for the future lies not in alterations of ecclesiastical organisation, but in a profounder apprehension of the essential ideas of Christianity; and especially in the growth, within the Church, of such a method of presenting them as shall show that they are equally adapted to the needs of

humanity and in harmony with the results of critical and scientific research."

In the execution of this excellent scheme it was inevitable that misunderstandings should arise. All the "specimens" given in the volume of this new school of Broad Church preaching were earnest and enlightened appeals on behalf of a simpler, soberer, more ethical rendering of Christianity than was current; and if they erred at all, it was more by what they did not say, than by positive erroneous statements. Two sermons, however, were singled out from among the rest as objectionable, and became the subject of a mild 'heresy hunt.' They were contributed by the Rev. W. L. M'Farlane, minister of Lenzie, and were entitled "Authority," and "The things which cannot be shaken." What was objected to in the latter sermon was the description of such "fundamentals" of the faith as the Fall, the Doctrine of Election, Eternal Punishment, and so forth, as "the discredited dogmas of the Schoolmen." The author began his sermon with an enumeration of the "discredited dogmas," seven in number. These were—(1) the descent of man from the Adam of the Book of Genesis; (2) the fall of Adam from a state of original righteousness by eating the forbidden fruit; (3) the imputation of Adam's guilt to all his posterity; (4) the consequent death of all men in sin; (5) the redemption in Christ of an election according to grace; (6) the quickening in the elect of a new life; and (7) the eternal perdition of those who remain unregenerate.

Various causes were assigned for the rejection of these dogmas. "It seems, in the first place," said

the preacher, "to an increasing number of intelligent persons, that Science has established her right to claim for man an antiquity so great as to be wholly incompatible with the scriptural account of a first progenitor of the human race, who was created, and who sinned and fell, some six thousand years previous to the present date. It seems to them, in the second place, that all investigations into the condition of man during these millenniums, many more than six, throughout which the human race has occupied the earth and left vestiges of its occupancy, prove that the path trodden by mankind has been one upwards and not downwards—; disprove, in other words, the doctrine that the race has lapsed from a state of paradisaic innocence, of primeval wisdom and integrity, such as that which Jewish Rabbis, and after them doctors of the Primitive Church, Mediæval Schoolmen, Puritan Divines, have imagined. Independently, however, of all scientific conjectures as to the origin of the human race, as to the condition of prehistoric man, as to the progress of mankind through successive stages of intellectual and moral growth, the old theological doctrine of the Fall of Adam, and the consequent death in sin of all his posterity, seems, in these days, to many men and women of cultivated intelligence, untenable. The spread of democratic ideas has rendered impossible for them the belief in hereditary demerit any more than in hereditary merit. They admit, of course, the hereditary transmission, from generation to generation, of habits, aptitudes for good or evil, qualities intellectual and moral no less than physical. They deny, on the other hand, the hereditary transmission of guilt or

blameworthiness, the imputation to the son of the sin of the father. They refuse to believe that the Infinite Being, of whom we speak as the Moral Governor of the Universe, has dealt with the successive generations of men as earthly sovereigns have with the children of rebels, whom, in obedience to a political exigency, real or imaginary, they have condemned to perpetual poverty and disgrace. They reject the proposition that the non-elect will, because of Adam's transgression, be punished with "the everlasting punishment of eternal fire."

M'Farlane's case was quickly disposed of by the General Assembly. It was urged by his friends that he had been misunderstood in his exposition of the views in question. The views objected to were those of modern thinkers which the preacher was expounding. The preacher did not claim them as his own views. He was not careful enough, indeed, to dissociate himself from them, and so far was to blame and deserving of admonition. But he could not be held guilty of heresy merely for repeating other men's heretical opinions. Dr. Cunningham took this line of defence, and led a minority of sympathisers with Broad Church teaching in a clever speech. He contended that M'Farlane was alone answerable for what he had *said*, and not for what he had not said. No man was responsible for his thoughts save to God; and he objected to any thumbscrew, mental or physical, being applied to the accused brother. "There lay beyond this the question of toleration in the Church of Scotland. It was said there had not been a deposition for heresy within the last forty years. It was a

proud thing to be able to say that; and when they went beyond these forty years they found that of the depositions which had taken place, the Church of Scotland was heartily ashamed. Never was a policy more successful than that of toleration; and was the present Assembly going to reverse it at *this particular crisis in the theology and theological history of our country?* If they did so, it would be a most disastrous day for the Church of Scotland and for the theology of Scotland. If they gave a decision in a just and generous spirit, they would attract to them thousands of men who were seeking for a refuge and resting-place." Some interpreted the closing references of this remarkable speech to the Robertson Smith case, then occupying the attention of the Free Church of Scotland, and to the dissatisfaction with which many in that Church regarded the prosecution against their distinguished scholar.

Dr. Cunningham's able plea for toleration was, however, rejected by the Assembly. By a vote of 230 against 61, it was decided to accept Professor Flint's motion, calling upon M'Farlane to disclaim the views objected to. The question was put to M'Farlane: "Do you disclaim the identification of your own views regarding the doctrine specified in Sermon II. with those of the modern theologian described as holding these doctrines, to be specially untenable, regret that your sermons should have given occasion to doubts as to the soundness of your teaching, and promise carefully to endeavour to avoid in future what may give occasion to such offence?" M'Farlane brought the case to an end by satisfactorily answering

the question put to him. The sermon was preached, he said, with a view to meet special objections that had been urged against certain doctrines in the Church's belief; and that it had not been his intention to identify himself with the objectors, but to state and try to meet their objections. "I regret that the unguarded publication of this sermon (without explanation of its motives) has given occasion of offence to any of my fathers and brethren; and I engage in the future to be careful not to give them any cause of anxiety as to my soundness in the faith." Thus ended the case of the "Scotch Sermons" before the Church Courts, in a manner highly satisfactory to the *ecclesiastical* mind, but somewhat disappointing alike to the ambitions and to the reputation of the Broad Church party.

No fault had been alleged against the positive element in M'Farlane's teaching. *The things that could not be shaken* were three, and were expressed in the form of propositions;—(1) that righteousness is blessedness; (2) that there is a Divine Being who is seeking to make men sharers in His blessedness by making them sharers in His righteousness; and (3) that in the cravings of the human soul for communion with that Power without it, which is the source of its being and the ground of its moral life, there is the pledge of its immortality. "In the three words Duty, God, Immortality are truths which no discoveries of science, no investigations of the Biblical critic, no wind of modern doctrine, can really endanger."

Many would doubt the alleged impregnableness of the ideas of God and immortality; but M'Farlane's

first impregnable dogma links him on to the best traditions of the Scottish philosophy, of which he may be regarded as a true nineteenth century disciple. He was evidently a robust believer in a moral and rational religion. His code of ethics might not be severely spiritual, but in reading his sermon and his elaboration of the proposition *rightcousness is blessedness*, one feels one's self back in the atmosphere of Hutcheson and the eighteenth century divines whom he influenced, a eudæmonistic atmosphere of the better type if you will, with its genial appeals to the agreeable and the benevolent, and its studied avoidance of all reflections fitted to mortify and humble human nature. That part of M'Farlane's sermon would have rejoiced the heart of David Hume. It comes near what he wished to hear more frequently from the pulpit, a moral sermon without doctrine.

Among the "Scotch Sermons" were two by Dr. Cunningham, one on "Home-Spun Religion," the other on "The Religion of Love," admirable specimens of a type of teaching common enough now but not too familiar in those days. A sermon that disturbed the slumbers of the traditionalists not a little, was that of Dr. Story on "Authority," in the course of which occurs many a bracing thought. Take, for instance, what is said as to the respect that is due to the human faculties. "It matters little what a man calls himself—, a 'prophet,' or an 'apostle,' or a 'descendant of the apostles'—the question is, What can he do? What can he teach? What is he in himself? It matters little what men say against or for a new form or a new system;—that it is not

Scriptural: that it is not according to the Fathers of the Church: that it is not according to the common custom; or that it *is* in accordance with Scripture and tradition and the usage and order of the Universal Church. The question is, Is it true? Is it better than what we have hitherto believed or practised? Does it approve itself to our reason and conscience as a thing reasonable, beneficial, as far as we can see according to God's will? If so, then it is no matter what custom or tradition is for it or against it. God has not given us our faculties that we should obey custom and tradition, but that in the growing light and liberty of our knowledge and faith we should serve Him, and learn the most we can of His truth, and do the best we can for His service: not with a grudging terror at every step of going wrong, but with a large and liberal trust in His fatherly guidance of us, as long as our hearts are right with Him."

Taking them all in all, however, the most interesting sermons in the volume were two by Principal Caird, one of them in especial on "Union with God." Caird had done his Church great service as a preacher before this time. Appearing in the forties when the Church of Scotland was still stunned and bleeding, and before she had recovered from the desolate forsakenness brought on her by the Disruption, he did much to brighten her prospects in the country. For it should never be forgotten that there were many clergymen left in the National Church who felt like Norman Macleod, that it was even harder to remain in it as repairers of the breach, than to go out amid "the huzzas of popular enthusiasm."

In 1855, Caird made his own fame and restored that of his Church by his sermon before Queen Victoria on *The Religion of Common Life*—, a sermon that Dean Stanley characterised as the "greatest single sermon of the century." In later years, following in the footsteps of Chalmers and of all the great divines of the Scottish School, he made use of the results of philosophy in building up his religious and theological teaching. He made it, indeed, the great aim of his life to show that religion had a basis in human reason. He had no patience with the school of Mansel, who accepted the Hamiltonian doctrine of relativity, and, abandoning reason, found refuge in faith. In his opening lecture as Professor of Divinity in Glasgow University, he entered a powerful protest against philosophical scepticism. "God, the highest of all beings, should be one of whom not the fewest, but the greatest number of qualitative limitations can be predicated. He is the Being in whom are all conceivable powers, excellencies, good and great qualities in their highest perfection. . . . The conclusion, therefore, to which by such considerations we seem to be led is, that the intellectual impotence with relation to divine things, of which so much has been made by this school of thinkers, is no real impotence. It is the impotence of thinking about nothing. If this philosophy be true, it is the apotheosis of zero; the highest type of religion would be sheer vacuity of mind, and of all human beings the idiot would be the most devout."

In his "Scotch Sermon" on "Union with God," we can trace the influence of the Hegelian view of things. On Hegelian principles of development we should ever

study the highest representative and not the lowest in the ascending scale, if we wish to know the truth about a creature's nature; in the case of Man, it should be Man in his most mature and most civilised condition, not Man as we find him in the childhood of the race or of the individual. Caird gives fine point to his sermon when he applies this well-known principle to the understanding of the soul's union to God. Combating the Unitarian criticism that the Incarnation presents us with a Saviour who is no Saviour, inasmuch as the double nature dehumanises Him, Caird says with fine impressiveness, "Whilst there is no doubt a way of thinking about the nature of God and man which would render this objection to the Christian doctrine unanswerable, there is another and different conception of them . . . which completely meets the difficulty. He makes it possible for all men to sympathise with Him, not by levelling down His own nature, but by raising theirs: not by disclaiming His own Divinity, but by declaring that there are Divine elements, Divine possibilities, in the common nature of man. He does not impoverish Himself of His own Infinitude, but He reveals the possibilities of an infinite wealth in us. 'It is true,' He seems to tell us, 'that I am Divine, that the human consciousness in Me is in absolute union with the consciousness of God: "Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee." But in so saying, I do not place an impassable gulf between My nature and yours, so as to remove Myself beyond the reach of your human fellowship and sympathy. I do not say that what I am you can never hope to become. In the contemplation of My example and of the ideal of good-

ness and greatness which I set before you, there is no point at which human sympathy and hope need be arrested. You too may become "partakers of a Divine nature." It is no impossible and extravagant aspiration for you also to entertain, that ye "may be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." "This is the record that God hath given to you, eternal life," "that eternal life which is in the Father and in His Son Jesus Christ." To enter into such identification with the very nature of Deity, that your thoughts, like Mine, shall be God's thoughts, your will and actions, like Mine, a Divine will, a Divine activity,—to become thus one with God as I am, is not to transcend but to realise your true nature as men. For nothing less than this is the height of spiritual attainment, the glorious consummation which I seek for humanity, for all My brethren after the flesh, "That they all may be one: as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee. . . . I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one."'"

Broad Church teaching of the "Scotch Sermons" type did an important work in Scotland. It widened the door of the visible Church, met men of culture and "honest doubt" on their own ground, bridged over the gulf separating the "sacred" and the "secular," and drew a much-needed attention to the grand yet simple elements present in all faith. Broad Churchism is often spoken of as a spent and dead force in the land. We should rather say it has done its work so well, leavening the thinking of the Churches with its tolerance and intelligence and putting an end to obscurantism in theology, that its occupation is for the present mostly

gone. In illustration of this point we have but to recall sentences from the volume dealt with in the present chapter, now tolerated everywhere, but at the time they appeared quoted with disapproval. "Christianity consists as much in a well-ordered life as in an orthodox creed, perhaps more so." "The Bible is authoritative because true, and not true because authoritative." "If we avoid sin merely because we dread its punishment . . . we are utilitarians and economists, not Christians." "I know nothing which has exercised a more pernicious influence on religion than that unhappy divorce which has been effected between religious duty and the everyday duties of life. When a mother is faithfully tending her children, and making her hearthstone clean and her fire burn bright that everything may smile a welcome to her weary husband when he returns from his work, it is never dreamt that she is religiously employed. When a man works hard during the day, and returns to his family in the evening to make them all happy by his placid temper and quiet jokes and dandlings on his knee, the world does not think—perhaps he does not think himself—that there is religion in anything so common as this. Religion is supposed to stand aloof from such familiar scenes. But to attend the church, to take the sacrament, to sing a psalm, to say a prayer, is religion. Now God help this poor sinful world if religion consists only in these things and not also in the other."[1]

One of the strongest of the Broad Church teachers in Scotland, a quarter of a century ago, was John Service

[1] *Scotch Sermons*, pp. 51, 212, 46.

of Inch, the friend of Professor Nichol of Glasgow. The volume *Scotch Sermons* would have been weightier than it was had it included Service among its contributors. He, besides being a gifted *litterateur*, is remembered as the most daringly original preacher in the Church of Scotland.

CHAPTER XI

ROBERTSON SMITH AND THE HIGHER CRITICISM

AUTHORITIES

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CHILLINGWORTH'S saying, "the Bible and the Bible only is the religion of Protestants," does not sound so strikingly true as interesting and suggestive. Thinking over it, the mind goes back to a time when men were excited and elated at their emancipation from the Papal power. Prior to the

Reformation, the Church was the all-powerful factor; it ruled everything and everywhere, and in consequence Scripture was put into the background, alike in life and worship. Dante complains that Churchmen in his time give not the Scriptures the consideration they deserve, all their attention being set on dogmas and decretals. To such broken cisterns they had resort instead of looking

> "to Nazareth,
> Where Gabriel once with wings wide open came."[1]

At the Reformation a reaction set in. Churchmen and scholars now revelled in new translations of the Bible and revised versions, with the important result that the Scriptures and the Church changed places. All for a time promised well, until the new ideas of the importance of Scripture grew hopelessly beyond control, and by the seventeenth century a theory of verbal inspiration had become the order of the day. Claims were set up in favour of Scripture that were almost as indefensible and mischievous as the old pretensions of the Papacy had been. The nineteenth century, however, was fruitful of happy changes. In that remarkable time a movement hostile to mechanical theories of Scripture arose, under the influence of the modern scientific spirit, and following the lead of the new philology and the historical method. In this new departure from moribund views, Scotland took an important share under the leadership of Robertson Smith.

Scholarship, strictly so called, had not hitherto been common among learned Scotsmen. Their studies had taken them more frequently into the fields of logic

[1] *Paradiso*, ix. 133.

and metaphysics rather than into those of literature and linguistics. Not that the latter were wholly neglected. Boston of Ettrick, as we have seen, prepared a work on Hebrew accentuation which won the approval of several continental authorities. John Livingstone, one of the ministers banished in the cruel days of Charles II., knew Hebrew and also something of Syriac. David Dickson edited a series of scholarly commentaries which included Hutchison on the Minor Prophets and Durham on the Song of Solomon, favourite books for a long time with the intelligent laity. But work of this kind was the exception. The historical method which has compelled us to examine our sacred books critically makes its appearance among us in the nineteenth century, although it may be seen asserting itself crudely in certain of the writings of the eighteenth century Deists. Their incredulity regarding the miracles of the Bible, in spite of its coarse and unscientific character, may be said to carry in it a demand for those later methods of historical treatment which the progress of philology was destined to bring to the birth.

The beginnings of the Higher Criticism are to be traced in France and Germany to the end of the seventeenth century. In 1680, Simon, a French priest, announced the discovery of double accounts of the same event in the Book of Genesis. Seventy years later, another Frenchman, Astruc, propounded the hypothesis of an Elohim and a Jahveh source running through the Pentateuch. About the same time, the German Eichhorn brought forward independent evidence of a similar discovery. At the beginning of the nineteenth

century, De Wette saw material in the Book of Deuteronomy so divergent from anything recorded in the earlier books, that he claimed for it the rank of a fourth document within the Pentateuchal canon. By the time of Ewald, the separate documents composing the Hexateuch were disentangled from the collection, and by the middle of the second half of the nineteenth century the clear evidence of four principal Hexateuchal documents was corroborated by independent scholars of the Bible, belonging to widely separate places and schools of theology, such as Kuenen in Holland, Wellhausen in Germany, Briggs in America, Driver in England, and Robertson Smith in Scotland.

The last named in this illustrious band held the Aberdeen professorship of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis in the Free Church of Scotland from 1870 till 1881. He had come under the powerful spell of the great Hebrew exegete, A. B. Davidson. On his installation to the chair at the early age of twenty-four, he chose for the subject of his inaugural address the significant theme, "What history teaches us to seek in the Bible." On account of his eminence as a Biblical scholar, he was asked to write a number of critical articles for the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. For the views propounded in these contributions—notably for his article "Bible"—the young and talented Professor was brought before the tribunals of his Church. The charges brought against him were mainly three—(1) Denying that the Aaronic priesthood was instituted in the wilderness. (2) Alleging that the legislative parts of Deuteronomy were a prophetic

recasting of the Mosaic law not older than the seventh century B.C. (3) Denying the verbal infallibility of the books of Chronicles. Other minor charges preferred against the Professor were his peculiar interpretation of the Song of Solomon, his assertion of corruptions in the text of the Old Testament, and his manner of describing the work of the prophets as addressing themselves in the first instance to the needs of their own times.

The new account of Deuteronomy proved to many a stone of stumbling. When it was alleged that the legislation imputed in Deuteronomy to Moses was, at least in great part, not his at all, but developments of later times that came to be associated with his name, people unaccustomed to critical studies regarded this as equivalent to imputing fraud to the writers of the Bible. In particular, the question of one sanctuary, and Robertson Smith's explanations thereof, raised great commotion. What was affirmed was, that for centuries in Canaan local sanctuaries had been recognised and sanctioned alike in law and practice. In the seventh century B.C., however, such gross abuses had crept in in connection with them, that a law was introduced for their abolition, and requiring in their stead one central sanctuary. Now, as this law of the central sanctuary forms part of the Deuteronomic legislation, we have here a clear proof, said Robertson Smith, "that Deuteronomy was unknown till long after the days of Moses. How could Joshua, if he had known such a law, have erected a *Maççēba* or sacred pillar of unhewn stone under the sacred tree by the sanctuary at Shechem? Nay, this law was still unknown to Isaiah, who attacks idolatry, but recognises

Maṣṣēba and altar as the marks of the sanctuary of Jehovah. 'In that day,' he says, prophesying the conversion of Egypt, 'there shall be an altar to Jehovah within the land of Egypt, and a *Maṣṣēba* at the border thereof to Jehovah' (xix. 19). Isaiah could not refer to a forbidden symbol as a *Maṣṣēba* to Jehovah. He takes it for granted that Egypt when converted will serve Jehovah by sacrifice (ver. 21), and do so under the familiar forms which Jehovah has not yet abrogated."[1]

When it became known that these were the views of a professor of the Free Church of Scotland, a cry arose throughout the country, in the Highlands notoriously, that the Bible was in danger of destruction, and that, too, at the hands of its paid defenders. Good men grew frantic, and said, why cannot professors let the Bible alone ; what call for raising doubts and alarms ; have the servants of Christ no better work to do than to encourage infidelity and sow the seeds of schism ?

The storm which now sprang up over the *Robertson Smith Case* was, of course, quite creditable to the Church in which he was the most gifted teacher. The questions he raised in his article "Bible," the doubts and difficulties he occasioned in men's minds, the revolutionary upheaval of old and cherished convictions he headed, could not be matters of indifference to the Church of Chalmers, Cunningham, and Candlish. To count it a matter of secondary importance what this new criticism asserted, Scripture being a sure and impregnable rock of truth against which the gates of hell could not prevail, was an impossible position for men to whom the Bible was something more than a

[1] *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*," p. 353.

book of information, even the voice of God speaking direct to their souls. Had they held, with Lessing and the Broad Church writers, that Scripture was a mere mine of doctrinal knowledge, a primer of religious education, the wildest theories of criticism might have been tolerated or ignored by them. A text-book of religious science like any other text-book might be so thoroughly well mastered by the student, that he could become in a great measure independent of the book, and no question as to its authorship or manner of composition need ever disturb his faith.

But the Free Church of Scotland, like other branches of the Reformed Church, held a different view of the place and purpose of the Bible. They held that it was given us not merely to put men in possession of true ideas of God, but as a means of enabling them to meet with God and enjoy fellowship with Him. Reading therein what holy men of old recorded, the believer sought to enter into living communion with Him who moved them to write as they did. The believer took the Bible into his hands not to replenish his mind with thoughts safely enough lodged there already by repeated perusal of it, but in order to hold intercourse with God and vividly realise His gracious personality and presence. Tennyson tells us that he read his friend's old letters, "the noble letters of the dead," not so much to inform himself of what he had said in them, but to hear him saying it, until,

> "Word by word and line by line
> The dead man touched me from the past,
> And all at once it seemed at last
> The living soul was flash'd on mine."

So it is necessary for us to bear in mind that by those to whom the new learning was an offence, the Bible was rightly regarded as a Divine instrument intended to bring God and the soul into living touch. Having this incomparable value for them, we can easily account for the vehemence with which in certain highly respected quarters the work of the Higher Criticism of the Bible was resisted.

But among the intelligent laity of the Free Church there was a small though gradually increasing number who understood the true significance of the critical movement, and perceived its value and inevitableness. They saw how it arose from the new intellectual conditions of life at the present day, how in every department of human knowledge the methods and tests of historical science are being rigorously applied, and how the theory of evolution requires of everything that exists an account of its origin and development. Every existing thing in this world having necessarily had a beginning, a growth, a course of progress, and a history, the mind inevitably seeks to trace the path of progress that any given fact has followed. Out of this necessary habit of the mind the criticism of the Bible has sprung; and not out of wantonness and unbelief, as some at the time honestly believed; but from a sincere and imperative desire to investigate the sources, origins, history, and growth of the record of divine revelation. Those who adopted this philosophical view of the matter maintained that, without assenting to all Robertson Smith's conclusions, the work in which he was employed was a legitimate and a necessary occupation of the believing mind. As he

himself said in his preface to *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, "It is of the first importance that the reader should realise that Biblical Criticism is not the invention of modern scholars, but the legitimate interpretation of historical facts. . . . In an age when all are interested in historical research, no apologetic can prevent thoughtful minds from drifting away from faith if the historical study of the Old Covenant is condemned by the Church and left in the hands of unbelievers."

The formal trial began in 1878 in the Presbytery of Aberdeen, where Smith was professor, and resulted in his acquittal by substantial majorities. As the questions dealt with in the case were all new to the Churches in Scotland, and the chief debaters on both sides showed a conspicuous amount of ability and learning, the case became a great education to the Free Church, the traces of which she carried with her when in 1900 she entered into union with a sister Church in Scotland. Smith's friends in the Presbytery did not accept all his critical conclusions,—as a matter of fact they repudiated most of them,—but they claimed for their distinguished comrade a place of tolerance in the Church, seeing that in their opinion he had written nothing that trenched on the fundamentals. The case came before the Assembly of 1878, where Smith had against him the few surviving stalwarts of the Disruption, James Begg, Wilson of Dundee, and Sir Henry Wellwood Moncreiff. On the other side at that time stood Robert Rainy and his henchman John Adam of Glasgow, the former then as always a host in himself.

The absurdity of a crowd of ministers and elders, numbering in all six hundred, constituting themselves

a court of justice to decide with calm judicial temper the most delicate points of doctrine, was never more palpably manifest than by an incident that happened in the course of the trial. The case occupied the two sederunts of a single day. At the morning sitting, which usually lasted till five o'clock in the afternoon, the party that followed Moncreiff and Begg secured a condemnation of the Professor's views, although on obviously unfair grounds, as was afterwards admitted. This party went home considerably elated with their victory, and returned in the evening to the remainder of the fray. Then a surprise awaited them. The accused appeared at the bar in his defence, and delighted the House with such a speech as he only could deliver, in which he shrivelled up the arguments of his assailants, and brought against them the impeachment of condemning him that morning for a doctrine of inspiration which was not and never had been his. The oratory of Robertson Smith exercised the same magic influence that Gladstone's did. It won those who listened to it to the speaker's side even before it had penetrated their understanding. On this evening, as those who were present testify, his eloquence transcended almost anything they had ever heard, and wrought such a revulsion of feeling that a motion declaring him untainted with heresy was carried triumphantly! In the swing of the pendulum, one gentleman, who in the early part of the day had voted the Professor a heretic, in the evening seconded the motion that cleared him of heresy!

With regard to Smith's power as a speaker, one felt there was something in it that gripped the

hearer more than mere words. Nor was the secret difficult to discover. To scholarship, the fame of which, as one has said,[1] would have filled half Europe had he lived in the glorious prime of the Italian Renaissance, and to gifts of expression such as come not once in a generation, Smith united the subtle charm of *unction*, a quality of the spiritual genius which is neither bred in the bone nor learned at the schools, and without some small mixture of which sacred eloquence is as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. "If I am asked," so he told his accusers, "why I receive Scripture as the Word of God and as the only perfect rule of faith and life, I answer with all the Fathers of the Protestant Church, because the Bible is the only record of the redeeming love of God, because in the Bible alone I find God drawing near to man in Christ Jesus and declaring to us in Him His will for our salvation."[2]

The cause of toleration unfortunately had but a shortlived victory. The fact is, many men had voted for toleration under considerable pressure. They admired the man whose name was in everybody's mouth; they knew him to be both a humble Christian man and a loyal son of the Church, but they did not like his critical conclusions and did not accept them. These they regarded as having decidedly a "dangerous and unsettling tendency," to use the familiar phrase applied to them, and every one who wished the Professor well, devoutly hoped they had seen the last of his attacks on the accepted views, and that he would be

[1] Bryce's *Studies in Contemporary Biography.*
[2] *Answer to the Form of Libel.*

careful in the future not to try the Church's long-suffering as he had done. In May 1880 his party obtained another victory, their hero being acquitted by a majority of seven in a house numbering close upon six hundred members.

But it was a margin too slender for the demand to be made upon it. The Fathers and brethren of the Assembly had barely time to get home to their Highland and rural manses, thankful that the strain of the two past years was now considerably eased, and that the prospect of peaceful days was now before their beloved Church, when unexpectedly, like a bolt from the blue, another "dangerous and unsettling" article appeared from the pen of the exasperating Professor in a new volume of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. The subject was "Hebrew Language and Literature," and the effect of the article, appearing at the time it did and after all that had preceded, was that the Professor was interdicted by the August Commission from teaching his classes the following winter. More serious results followed. Although no new error was discovered in the offending article, the Assembly of 1881 deprived him of his professoriate altogether, and that without a trial! He thus found himself ejected from the service of a Church he dearly loved, not because he stood convicted of error or had departed from her standards, but to save the Church from a state of disturbance that threatened to split her in pieces. Honoured leaders who had hitherto ranged themselves on the side of tolerance, saw fit now to alter their policy and join in the cry for his dismissal. Doubtless they acted in what they considered to be for

the best interests of Christ's cause, but it is believed some of them would afterwards have given a good deal to be able to undo what they then did.

One who fought bravely for the toleration of the new criticism was Professor James S. Candlish of Glasgow. At an early stage of the proceedings he gave the Church the benefit of his views in a pamphlet on "The Authority of Scripture independent of Criticism," characterised by much breadth, sobriety, and lucidity. He began by quoting with approval the statement contained in the Larger Catechism—, "The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the Word of God by their majesty and purity: by the consent of all the parts and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God: by their light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and build up believers unto salvation: but the Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in the heart of man is alone able fully to persuade it that they are the very Word of God." He then went on to say, "It is thus a truth of which we can be sure on truly religious and spiritual evidence: and if we hold it firmly on this ground our belief will be independent of criticism; both the 'lower' or textual and grammatical, whose function it is to ascertain what is the original and correct reading and the real meaning of the sacred writings: and what is called the 'higher' or historical criticism, which aims at an understanding of the general ideas of the various parts of Scripture and their historical connections. Both these kinds of criticism are legitimate and valuable: but as they only deal with the meaning of the sacred books, no results to which they

lead can affect a faith which rests upon the grounds set forth in our standards. If, however, we are not content with these grounds, but think it necessary to add to them some theory as to the nature of Scripture, we make our belief of the Bible depend upon questions on which criticism alone has a right to decide. The purity, heavenliness, and spiritual power of Scripture are qualities with which no criticism, lower or higher, has to do; and therefore a faith that rests on them is secure whatever criticism may say. But if we lay down such propositions as these; — Scripture being divine must have an absolutely pure text, or must be written in perfect grammatical style, without solecisms or irregularities, or must be always literally interpreted, or cannot contain an exhibition of mere earthly love or a work of imagination; we endanger our faith by making it depend on the replies to questions that can alone be answered by criticism. For it is that alone that can tell us whether the text of a book is pure, or its style grammatical, or its contents historical or figurative."[1]

Pursuing the argument in favour of toleration, Dr. Candlish went on to attempt a mediation between the opposing parties. "There is a parallel to Professor Smith's view of Deuteronomy," said he, "not only in the Book of Job, but also in that which is held by nearly all scholars, even the most orthodox, in regard to Ecclesiastes. This book is admitted by such men as Hengstenberg, Keil, and Delitzsch to be of much later date than the time of Solomon, and to consist of reflections on the vanity of human life without God that are put into the mouth of the wise king, by a

[1] *Authority of Scripture*, p. 2.

poetical figure, to give them greater point and emphasis. But it is maintained that there was in this no deception, and nothing inconsistent with divine inspiration; because it was well known at the time to be merely a form of representation."[1] The writer of this pamphlet was a philosophical divine, but without the oratorical gifts necessary to give his words weight in the Assembly. No other man at the time, however, exercised a saner judgment, or was so anxious to see criticism tolerated. "We are not," he said, in urging the duty of approaching the Bible unbiassed by presuppositions, "in a position to judge beforehand in what form God will make Himself known and reveal His will to us; and we may very easily suppose that He must give us a kind and degree of certainty about every part of His revelation which it has not pleased Him to afford. He may have seen fit to leave us, in regard to many of the events in the history of His salvation, in a state of ignorance or uncertainty that we would not have thought beforehand a divine revelation would have left. To assume that because it is a Divine Book, the Bible, or any particular part of it, must be written in any particular way, is to adopt the principle of the most thoroughgoing and dangerous Rationalism. Our only safe method is to learn from the study of itself what the Bible actually is, and to judge from the nature of each part and its relation to others what is literal and what is figurative, what historical and what poetical."

The ejected Professor was too magnanimous to stand on his legal rights, but he was not above taking his appeal to the people of Scotland and defending his

[1] *Authority of Scripture*, p. 23. [2] *Ibid.* p. 17.

critical methods in the sight of the world. This he did in two series of lectures, delivered in Edinburgh and Glasgow, at the request of certain laymen of the Church, and afterwards published under the titles, "The Old Testament in the Jewish Church" and "The Prophets of Israel." Latterly he left Scotland and took up his abode in Cambridge, where he held important academic appointments, being finally appointed Lord Almoner Professor of Arabic, and where in 1894, amid universal lamentation, he died.

Like the old tyrants of Syracuse, who never confessed themselves mistaken, the Church Courts of Scotland have never reponed heretics. Since that discreditable day in 1881 when a majority of the Free Church deemed it expedient that one man should die for the people, Robertson Smith's case has never had any official notice taken of it. But the Church that cast him out from her bosom has served herself heir to his prophetic mantle, and since his ejection has developed a strong liking for critical studies that may well be construed as an act of repentance and reparation. Robertson Smith has lit a candle in the Church that will not soon be put out. There are few, whether they are aware of it or not, whose knowledge of religious truth has not been broadened and enriched by the critical movements associated with his name. To many the Bible, once a sealed volume, or a mere collection of allegories, now brings a message that quickens the intelligence and is a joy and rejoicing to the heart. Sweepingly rash and presumptuous the conclusions of Criticism have often been, but its method is right, and in wise hands is seen to be capable of yielding a

rich harvest. When we see what the prophet's message meant to his contemporaries, when studying the text historically we take our stand where the first hearers of the prophet stood, the words of Scripture are found intelligible, inspiring, and helpful to the circumstances of our own time. Preachers like Savonarola, going back to the standpoint of the Old Testament writings until their minds are steeped therein, hearkening with open ear to the prophet's very words of appeal and complaint which he addresses to the statesmen of Judah, rouse a sinful people to repentance with a power that is irresistible. There have been heresy prosecutions since Robertson Smith's day, and attempts made to suppress new learning, but criticism has never been treated as something forbidden or its merchandise declared contraband.

Eight years after Robertson Smith's lamented death, Old Testament criticism, for which he had done such splendid service, was again on its trial before a Scottish General Assembly. The "offender" was George Adam Smith, Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Literature in the United Free Church College of Glasgow, and his cause of offence a volume of lectures delivered in America and published in this country, under the title — *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament.* In these lectures the Professor was charged with advocating views of the most revolutionary kind; attributing to the religion of Revelation a polytheistic character down to the time of the great prophets; denying the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis, and tracing their origin to Babylonian legend and myth; imputing a fanciful

and parabolic character to the lives of the patriarchs; treating Messianic prophecy naturalistically; and supporting critical theories that were flagrantly inconsistent with the teaching of our Lord.

A memorial embodying these charges was sent to the College Committee from a meeting held in Edinburgh in September 1901. That learned body investigated the charges and prepared a report to come before the Assembly of 1902. The report bore that the volume under dispute was manifestly apologetic in its aim, was, as the author himself expressly stated, "in defence upon critical grounds of the Christian's faith in the Old Testament as containing the Word of God": and this fact the memorialists had overlooked, with the result that the points selected for attack had been placed in a false perspective.[1] At the same time, the Committee deprecated the manner in which the Professor had set forth his opinions. He was not sufficiently considerate of views hitherto universal in the Church. "The conclusions which he advances are at times presented in a way that is fitted to perplex men who have no desire to fetter free and reverent inquiry, but who deprecate and are disturbed by hasty decision on matters of such vital moment as those involved."[2] A sample of the *inconsiderateness* referred to occurs in Professor Smith's second lecture, where the author admits that modern criticism has won its war against traditional theories, and adds, "it only remains to fix the amount of the *indemnity*," an unfortunate expression for which the Professor was taken to task by one great leader of the Church.

[1] *College Committee's Special Report*, p. 2. [2] *Ibid.* p. 3.

The report next dealt with the alleged polytheism of the Bible. The view objected to was in these words: "It is plain, then, that to whatever heights the religion of Israel afterwards rose, it remained before the age of the great prophets not only similar to, but in all respects above mentioned identical with, the general Semitic religion; which was not a monotheism, but a polytheism with an opportunity for monotheism at the heart of it—each tribe being attached to one god as to their particular Lord and Father."[1] The Committee did not greatly object to this view. They did not interpret it as meaning that God in His Word sanctioned a belief in the reality of other gods: although it implied that it was long before Israel was able to clear itself from the idea of national gods and to rise to the conception of Jehovah as the one only God. Jehovah seems to have been for a time regarded by Israel as their tribal deity; nor did they question the existence of the gods of other nations. That was all that was in the view. Professor Smith did not insinuate that Israel was free to worship other gods than Jehovah. His view was that until the monotheistic germ at the heart of their relation to Jehovah had developed, the obligation to worship Him alone did not prevent belief in the legitimacy of the worship of other gods by these nations. He distinctly taught that from the first Israel saw in their own God attributes of a higher kind than any that the heathen attributed to their gods; and that by the eighth century, and probably before that time, the bonds of a mere tribal

[1] *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 130.

morality and of a tribal conception of God had been broken.

The Committee found even less to object to in Dr. Smith's account of *Mosaic legislation*, that it was a body of law that at various later dates was received as authoritative, and had assumed its present form about the age of the Exile. They did not agree with the Memorialists in thinking that this was a view inconsistent with the Divine Inspiration and authority of the Bible; on the contrary, they held that it enabled us to recognise more impressively than before the process of the Divine Revelation in the Bible.

Summing up the result of their investigations, the Committee showed that in the volume *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, the Professor had not gone beyond the train of conclusions usually drawn by the representatives of recent criticism. That criticism has presented, indeed, a new view of Hebrew literature and a new conception of Hebrew history; but it has gained the assent of a large number of competent scholars, many of them believing men. If the criticism is wrong, let it be discussed and the teachers of erroneous critical theories put right, not libelled. This attitude of tolerance was worthy of men who had not failed to profit by the lessons of the Robertson Smith case.

The Professor's explanations were equally frank and pacificatory. He explained that in publishing his lectures he had in view those who are embarrassed by the Religion of the Old Testament, and by the interpretation of it furnished by the modern critical school. "I endeavoured, and as I believe with success,

to show that a critical treatment of the facts presented by the Hebrew Scriptures, so far from compelling a thoughtful Christian to give up his faith, furnishes for the main doctrines of our religion what (in my opinion) are stronger grounds than those furnished by the former apologetic of the Church."[1] He showed how the religion of Israel, though starting from the level of other Semitic peoples, became in course of time monotheistic. And he made it clear that the progress in Israel's case was due not to physical, intellectual, and political conditions, in which respects the other Semite tribes were not different from them, but purely and entirely to Divine Revelation. As to the early chapters of Genesis, Professor Smith boldly claimed for Revelation the right to use the early Semitic folk-lore contained in myth and legend for the investment and conveyance of its own higher spiritual teachings, even as to the very end the Bible speaks in the language of an exploded astronomy. The employment of human cosmogonies and myths is an example of His power who said, "Behold, I make all things new." The "raw material" out of which the framework has been constructed has in these first eleven chapters of Genesis been purged of all polytheistic elements, and that book alone of all Semitic cosmogonic literature presents us with a pure and sublime monotheism. In equally lucid and reasonable terms the Professor explained his treatment of the Messianic element in the Old Testament, as well as his firm belief in the personality of Abraham and the Patriarchs.

The Assembly that year (1902) met in Glasgow,

[1] *College Committee's Special Report*, p. 9.

"where," to quote Dr. John M'Ewan's breezy words, "Alexander Henderson once so nobly presided, and where they did notable things in the way of cleansing the Church from error." Both sections of the now United Free Church of Scotland joined in the controversy irrespective of their former ecclesiastical division. That Boanerges of the United Presbyterians, Dr. John Smith, joined hands against the Professor with the Free Church son of thunder, Dr. John M'Ewan; and Dr. James Orr shared the honour of defending him in company with Dr. Ross Taylor. Professor Orr at the outset of the debate paid his colleague a finely-expressed and well-deserved tribute of praise. Whatever they might think of Professor Smith's speculations, he remarked, there could be but one opinion among them that he at least had nobly proved in the past his faith, zeal, and evangelical fidelity, by works that had made his name a household word and an honour; that he had preached a living gospel, and had been made instrumental, as few were, by tongue of fire and vivid imagination and prophetic fervour to kindle faith and move to godliness in an age far lost to prophetic ideals. Rather than accentuate by continual controversy and new Committees the points on which they might unhappily differ, let them unite in thanking God for the gift He had given in him, and for the work he had been enabled to accomplish for God's glory.

Some, preferring principles to persons, deemed this eloquent eulogium irrelevant to the matter in hand. A Church that went on from generation to generation, said Dr. John Smith, could not build upon individual men or their private convictions. Where were the men

who built up the great Free Church? Gone. The only foundation of a Church was a basis of consistent and coherent principles. Therefore let them leave the discussion of the *men* and search their *positions*. "What about this believing criticism?" he continued. "It started where the naturalistic criticism started. It adopted its principle of natural development. In the main it adopted the disintegration of the Pentateuch. In the main it held by the literary analysis on which that disintegration was based. In all that, it had gone as thoroughly away from the self-witness of revelation, of a divine plan proceeding on divine lines according to a plan in the counsel of God, as the naturalistic criticism itself. Here came in the difference. Good men brought up in a warm and spiritual atmosphere, discerned even in the fragments of the broken mirror gleams of God. They saw there was something more than natural here. There was an authentic revelation of God. But that only showed that up to this point they had been proceeding on mistaken ideas. Some went farther and some not so far; and the Church was to fluctuate with all the fluctuations of these Protean minds. Why, they would need to set up a Reuter's agency and offer a hundred critical opinions for a guinea, that ministers might know how far to go and where to stop. There was the yawning gulf at their feet."[1]

He was against accepting the Committee's report, and in favour of the appointment of a large representative Committee to take account of the situation. On the other side, the motion of Principal Rainy proposed

[1] *Assembly Proceedings*, p. 104.

to receive and adopt the report, and declared no process for a libel necessary. At the same time it neither accepted nor authorised Professor Smith's views, warned ministers to be careful in their treatment of critical questions, and exhorted the people of the Church not to be soon shaken in their mind. In support of his motion the Principal made the speech of the day. It was characterised by masterly power and judiciousness. "If the facts," he said, "turned out to be facts, the discovery of them might very likely involve pain. But if the facts were facts the ascertainment of them was pure gain, so far as they were facts, to everybody. That was why he did not like Professor Smith's words about *indemnity*. He knew nothing of indemnity. When he saw evidence for the facts they were God's facts, and they would only be his help in the end if he could duly make use of them. Supposing that such facts began to be proved? Must they give up the Bible? No. But they must submit to the modification of some cherished views about the way in which the lines of the revelation of God's will for our salvation were appointed by Him to take shape in the Scriptures; and they would find themselves very much as they did about those earliest chapters of Genesis in reference to Creation, acquiring a new way of understanding the mind of God."

The debate ended in a victory for the College Committee and the offending Professor. Peace and harmony again entered the Church like a flood of grateful sunshine. The harsh notes of discord and threatening subsided, and fathers and brethren settled once more to the fulfilment of their practical duties.

CHAPTER XII

THE DODS-BRUCE CASE

AUTHORITIES

Proceedings of Free Church Assembly, 1890.
College Committee's Special Report.
Dods' *Commentary on 1 Corinthians.* Lond. 1889.
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Sermon by Dr. Dods on *What is a Christian?* Edin. 1890.
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Dr. A. B. Bruce's *The Kingdom of God.* Edin. 1889. Sixth Edition 1904.
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Memorials of a Ministry on the Clyde, with Memoir of Macellar. By A. B. Bruce. Glasg. 1876.

HAVING now reached the final chapter of our story, we may pause for a moment, for the sake of taking a backward glance along the road we have travelled, and of noting one or two things touching the uses and the character of religious controversy. In the first place, Scottish religious controversy, as we have had abundant occasion to see, has usually been carried on with a considerable amount of warmth and even bitterness. Our ecclesiastical and theological guides, when they have fallen out by the way, have not been prone to consider and conciliate one another, but have too often confronted one another with angry

altercation, and sometimes even resorted to the cruel tactics of the persecutor. And over such unhappy spectacles the world has shaken its virtuous head, and cried derisively, *Behold how these Christians love one another!* But there is surely a sounder and more robust way of viewing these sad and sombre habits of the controversialist. Granting that the battles of religious men have been accompanied by a regrettable loss of temper and by many a humbling display of human infirmity, we should remember what vital issues were, or were believed to be, at stake, as also that there are times and seasons when it is neither weak nor wicked to be angry, or when at least anger is an infirmity of noble minds. If the sacred interests of religion are in danger, it may be no ignoble virtue, on the part of earnest men, to contend right lustily for the truth, and even to deal out blows at the defenders of error which are meant, metaphorically speaking, to draw blood.

Nor should it be forgotten that the clang of controversy, whether admirable from the ethical point of view or not, has ever been an important and necessary condition of intellectual progress. At no time has either a person or a principle become epoch-making without having first encountered criticism and condemnation. Some element of antagonism seems necessary for the propagation of truth. It is not necessarily a waste of time, therefore, as some good men have supposed, when a Church finds herself engaged in bitter and prolonged theological strife. So far from this, it is the means which Divine Providence employs for leading the Church into larger

liberty and into fuller possession of the truth, which is her best heritage.

Besides, when we consider the difference between the scholarly and the ecclesiastical habit of mind, we see that collision and contention are unavoidable. Like the man of science, the scholar concerns himself mainly with facts, and gives his whole attention to their examination and analysis. The questions which he asks relate exclusively to their reality and ground. With their practical drift and tendency he is not primarily interested. It is different with the ecclesiastic. He, like the statesman, considers at once the bearing that new facts are likely to have on the beliefs and practices of men, asks how he is to deal with them, how meet them, how resist them, how reconcile them to accepted facts. The ecclesiastic has the safety of his Church to consider, and naturally views new facts with a certain measure of suspicion and dislike. Now these divergent habits of mind exist side by side in every large Christian communion, and the consequence is that from time to time we hear of open rupture within the Church's borders.

Thus it came about that in 1890 the Free Church of Scotland found herself once more in the ferment of controversy and entangled with the difficulties of *the Dods-Bruce case*. The Church at that time did not number within her ranks a clergyman more highly esteemed than Dr. Marcus Dods. For years he had exercised his ministerial gifts in Glasgow among the better educated classes of the city; but his name and influence had extended far beyond the bounds of the western capital. A man full of reverence yet daringly

speculative, a scholar of rare faculty and attainment, the master of a lucid, persuasive style, Dr. Dods' name was familiar to the religious world long before his orthodoxy was challenged, and that for the second time, by means of his published lectures and expositions. In 1889 he had been promoted to the chair of New Testament Exegesis in the New College, Edinburgh, an appointment that was made with much satisfaction and enthusiasm by the Church. But he had been only a year in the professorial chair when some utterances of his on the most fundamental doctrines were quoted with disapproval. An ephemeral crop of pamphlets, memorials, and overtures sprang up through the country, calling attention to the Professor's heretical views on Holy Scripture, the Divinity of Christ, the Atonement, and the Resurrection, and a rally of the faith's defenders entered the field armed with weapons that were not less hurtful because they were so obsolete, resolved to bring the offender to their feet.

In the quotations from his speeches and writings which were to form the indictment against him, Dr. Dods, it must be confessed, had (at least to those who ignored the important fact of his apologetic aims and methods) something of the appearance of a teacher who rather courted challenge than feared it. Thus, in his expository work on 1st Corinthians, he had spoken of our Lord's resurrection as if its historicity were a matter of indifference. "If any one finds it impossible," he said, "to believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ, but easy to believe in His present life and power, it would only be mischievous to require

of him a faith he cannot give in addition to a faith which brings him into real fellowship with Christ." Again, preaching from the historic pulpit of St. Giles' Cathedral, in a sermon on "What is a Christian?" he had said, "If, then, we are accepting God's forgiveness, and living humbly in the sunshine of His favour, we need not be seriously disturbed in spirit if we find that we cannot accept what is known as the orthodox theory of the Atonement. That theory is that Christ took our place and bore the punishment due to us, so that we can now claim forgiveness in His name and on the ground that our sins have been punished in Him, and are therefore not punished in us. This theory has the great advantages of being easily stated and easily intelligible, of linking itself to the sacrificial rites of the Old Testament and of answering to a large part of the language of the New Testament. It is open, however, to obvious objections. Men are conscious, very conscious, that they bear the punishment of their own sins all their life through. They find they are delivered from punishment precisely in proportion as they are delivered from sin, and they cannot understand how it can be said that Christ bore their punishment in the sense of relieving them from all suffering of punishment. They cannot believe that God needed to be propitiated, but rather accept the statement of our Lord Himself, that God loved and longed for His children even when they had strayed from Him. They consider Christ's life and death to be a manifestation or expression of His redeeming love; that Christ came to the world to reveal God's love, and by dying show that there

was no bound to that love, that it gave all that could be given. It is this they think which conquers men, this which humbles men, this which causes them to feel rightly towards God and towards sin. In point of fact both theories of the Atonement produce good Christians."[1]

The College Sub-Committee, reporting on the Professor's views, could not approve of them outright, although it leaned decidedly to the side of toleration. For one thing, it remarked on "the easy way in which it can be said, *both theories of the Atonement produce good Christians*," and declared such an attitude to be "little in keeping with the moral earnestness on this fundamental doctrine for which we must look in our professors." The Professor, however, was not to be moved from his position. "As regards the Atonement," he told the Committee, "I can only say that I have carefully and repeatedly gone over the Confessional statement of this doctrine, and I can detect in it nothing with which I do not agree, or with which any published statement of mine is inconsistent. The Confessional statement is indeed surprisingly brief. It emphasises the satisfaction of the Divine Justice, and this I too desire to emphasise; but it is to be remembered that the Atonement being the central fact of this world's history, has a hundred different faces and aspects, and I claim liberty to emphasise as I find occasion and according to my impression of existing needs, aspects, and bearings of the death of Christ which are not specified in the Confession."

On the Divinity of our Lord, the Committee pro-

[1] *What is a Christian?* p. 5.

nounced the teaching of the St. Giles sermon difficult in any way to justify Dr. Dods had said: "We must not too hastily conclude that even a belief in Christ's Divinity is essential to the true Christian. To the mature Christian it is essential no doubt; but in Christ's own life some sincerely followed Him who only at a later period were convinced that He was not only sent by God, but was God."[1] At the same time, the Committee candidly allowed that the sermon was addressed to those who were exposed to modern negative influences, and such as were believed to have honest though imperfect and mistaken impressions of the Person of Christ; and the point of the preacher seemed to be that such hearers, provided these crude impressions did their work upon their honest minds, would ultimately come to clear Christian views of Christ. Were, then, such hopeful ones to be denied the name of Christian because their knowledge was imperfect? The Committee, agreeing with the preacher, thought not. Dr. Dods, they said, was not thinking merely of the state of mind which denies Christ's Divinity. He was thinking of an attitude of mind and heart toward Christ which "practically makes Christ its God." This was an experience which logically required the recognition of the doctrine of Christ's Divinity. But Dr. Dods supposed that minds so situated may fail to realise all that their own experience really implied.

The curious thing about the offending sermon was, that years before it was delivered in St. Giles, the guileless Fathers and brethren who attend the Sabbath services in the Assembly Hall while the Assembly is

[1] *What is a Christian?* p. 6.

in session, had the same sermon delivered in their hearing, but without challenging its orthodoxy! The fact was that none of Dr. Dods' 'heretical' opinions had been rashly or recently adopted. His views on Inspiration formed the chief complaint against him, but they had brought him prominently before the Church Courts as early as 1877. At that time he preached and published a sermon that gave great offence, on "Revelation and Inspiration." And although, in deference to the advice of his brethren, he agreed to suppress it, he consistently refused to disown the views contained in it. And now, thirteen years afterwards, we find him again in trouble on the same subject, in his inaugural lecture as professor in the New College. With honest, and even cavalier outspokenness, he described the doctrine of verbal inspiration as "a theory of inspiration which has made the Bible an offence to many honest men, which is dishonouring to God, and which has turned inquirers into sceptics by the thousand,— a theory which should be branded as heretical in every Christian Church." The Committee, while clear that no case had arisen against Dr. Dods for process, but one only for friendly discussion, and that his views were not excluded by the Confession of Faith, described the language of the foregoing extract as *intemperate*.

But what caused chief alarm in the Church was an article in the *Expositor*, viii. (3rd Series) in which Dr. Dods imputed to the Old Testament *mistakes* and *immoralities*. These ill-chosen terms, too strong for anything intended by them, provoked a whirlwind of indignant protest. "If we have not an infallible book," said Mr. Howie of Govan, "where are we to

get our doctrines and duties?" Dr. John M'Ewan, Edinburgh, declared the matter to be graver than the issues at stake at the Disruption, a matter of life or death with the Church. Dr. Dods, before the case came to the Assembly, explained his position in an admirably conciliatory yet independent tone: "As regards the inspiration of Scripture," he said, "I hold with the Confession, that all the writings of the Old and New Testaments are '*given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life*'; but I do not hold that inspiration guarantees Scripture from inaccuracy in all its particular statements; neither do I find that the Confession either expresses or implies any such idea of inspiration. The affirmation of inaccuracy in certain details has assuredly a bearing on one's theory of inspiration; but it does not, on my part, involve the slightest hesitation as to the Divine authority of Scripture, the pervading influence which makes it God's Word, and its fitness, when interpreted, as the Confession itself directs, by a due comparison of its various parts, to be the conclusive rule of faith and life."[1]

The debate in the Assembly centred round the College Committee's report; and five different motions were brought forward, each proposing to deal with the trouble in a way of its own. Two of these only need occupy our attention here. One of them was proposed by Dr. John Adam of Glasgow. It agreed with the Report of the College Committee, that there was no ground for a libel against the Professor, but deemed it necessary to declare to the world that the Church stood immovably by the cardinal doctrine of our Lord's

[1] *College Committee's Report*, p. 15.

Divinity, and disapproved of all representations tending to lower its importance. So on the subject of the Atonement the motion repudiated the description of it as a mere theory ; and on the Resurrection of Christ, declared it to be a fact incontestably proved and lying at the foundation of Christianity. As regards the "*mistakes*" and "*immoralities*" of the Bible, the motion characterised Dr. Dods' language as an utterly unwarrantable account of certain admitted difficulties presented in Scripture.

Dr. Adam's motion, while it totally sundered him from those who desired a libel, was supported in a speech which consisted of one blow after another at the Professor for the annoyance and trouble he had brought on the Church. Adam was a typical ecclesiastic. A kindly man, and a respectable scholar, he was at the same time a born fighter. While not over-popular in the Church Courts, it must be said that the official leaders had no truer friend and comrade, and his sudden death before the Church's highest honour came to him was an event universally deplored. He did not waste time cultivating pet hobbies or examining facts critically. Like the Duke of Wellington, the one question with him always was, "How are you going to carry on the Government?" In his speech on this occasion he complained that what the Professor had said gave the Unitarians cause to rejoice, and reduced the orthodox doctrine of the Atonement to the level of one theory out of many. Yet he frankly admitted that Dr. Dods was personally a believer in the Atonement. Upon this some members of the Assembly interrupted the speaker with murmurs of disapprobation and cries of "Oh!

oh!" But Adam silenced them in a moment, and declared that the proof of what he was saying was furnished by Dr. Dods' writings. But in another moment he seemed to draw back the admission he had made. He would not have a man reduce the confessional view of the Atonement to the level of a mere phase or aspect of the Saviour's death. "His opinion, and it was the opinion in which he would die, was that if the Atonement be anything, it was everything. It was central, it was vital, it was all-controlling. It was not sufficient to him that in voluminous writings they could cull two or three references to it. That was not the place it ought to occupy. He thought it ought to stand out with great prominence and shed its light over the entire field of divine truth."[1]

With the dexterity of "an old parliamentary hand," Adam then tackled the question of *errors* and *immoralities*, now praising the Professor, now blaming him, toying with his arguments and tearing them asunder, balancing views the most contradictory, frankly making concessions and then drawing them back or qualifying them, but all the while sending home the conviction to the mind of the Assembly that they need not carry matters to the last extremity, but only dissociate themselves completely from the Professor's rash and faulty utterances. As to the Professor's view that the writers of Scripture were not divinely guarded against every kind of inaccuracy, but only infallibly guided in relation to the great purpose of the Bible, Adam reminded the Assembly that Dr. Dods held this view long before the Church had appointed him to the

[1] *Assembly Proceedings* (1890), p. 73.

chair which he now occupied. He had never concealed his views of inspiration from the Church, but had published these widely in season and *more frequently out of season*. It was a comparatively new view to them, and one altogether opposed to the ideas entertained by all their former theologians. But there was no question it had come to be most extensively adopted. Without doubt it involved tremendous risks. Where were they to stop in their application of such a principle? Here was a chink, would it not open and widen until the whole flood came rushing in? Changing his tack, he reminded the Assembly that they must recognise facts. One fact they could not get past was, that a number of the most earnest and believing defenders of Christianity had adopted this view of inspiration, and did so because they honestly thought it gave them the best ground on which to meet infidel attacks and guard the citadel of their religion.

Veering round again, the versatile leader denounced Dr. Dods for calling the verbal theory an offence to honest men, dishonouring to God, and making inquirers sceptics,—a view that ought to be branded as heretical in every Christian Church. "That," said he passionately, "was wild language. He regarded it as foolish language. He thought it was presumptuous in Dr. Dods, with all his eminence, so to characterise a view that had been held by many of the most learned and able and devoted theologians in this age and in past ages."[1] As to the *mistakes* and *immoralities* of the Old Testament, the friends of Dr. Dods assured him, and he believed them, that all that he meant by the offensive

[1] *Assembly Proceedings*, p. 74.

language was that the morality of the old economy was not so perfect as that of the new,—an admission which again drew from the left the cry of "Oh! oh!" Adam rounded on them in a moment. Did they mean to tell him that the light of the old economy was the same as the new? Did they mean to say that the power of the Spirit under the old economy was what it was under the new? Again turning on the object of his wrath, he delivered himself of a parting blow. If that were all that Dr. Dods meant by *errors and immoralities*, "why in all the world did he not say what he meant, and say it plainly? Dr. Dods knew the English language; he could use it well: why should he speak in mystery; and why use language needlessly irritating and offensive?"

Another way of dealing with the case was proposed by Mr. Howie of Govan. He wanted a special Committee appointed to deal further with Dr. Dods. He would not accept the College Committee's report. His motion declared that the publication of his views was specially blameworthy in Dr. Dods after the clear expression of the Church's mind in 1878. His motion also condemned the view that there are errors in the Scriptures *as originally given*. What no one could understand was how Mr. Howie could find comfort in the phrase *the Scriptures as originally given*,—a phrase as mischievous as it was unauthorised. As Dr. Ross Taylor pointed out, the idea of there being a substantial difference between the Scriptures as we presently possess them and *the Scriptures as originally given*, was pure unverifiable assumption. It was, besides, dangerous doctrine. Dr. Ross Taylor held that our people have

in their hands at present as perfect a Bible as the Holy Spirit regarded as needful for their spiritual knowledge and salvation, and as was ever given into the hands of men. "He did not admit that there was some very special miraculous care at one time, and that then it was allowed to go on the waves of time. He held that it came from the Father; and when he found that there were small minute details that suggested difficulties, the question came to be, how did these bear on their doctrine of inspiration? The result was that they as humble learners from God's own Word came to the conclusion that the divine revealing Spirit in declaring His will for men's salvation had given them in His blessed Word—and had designed to give them—not a record marked by slavish exactness in regard to every immaterial detail, but a full and adequate and perfect revelation of what they required to know for their salvation, revealing Christ in type, promise, prophecy, and fact."[1]

One of the best speeches in favour of Dr. Dods was by a country brother, M'Kenzie of Falkland. It overflowed with character, unconventionality, and humour. He told the House that he had been a member of Assembly for twenty years, and never listened before to so much orthodoxy in one day! They were all hyper-orthodox. "Dr. Dods had not brought all this into the Free Church. Such views were found in the press, in the religious novels of the time. Major Macleod called them criminal! He would tell them what was criminal. It was criminal to shut their eyes to these things. Dr. Dods had gone down to the arena

[1] *Assembly Proceedings*, p. 117.

and tried to fight these men with their own weapons, and men were crying out, 'You have bungled the whole business.' A great deal was said of Dr. Dods' statement regarding the minimum of belief necessary to a Christian. But Dr. Dods had said, 'I must do the work I am called to do. I am delighted that other men should put things differently, but I have also an evangelistic function which I cannot decline to discharge.' Dr. Dods was an evangelist. All that the Highland ministers under whom he himself used to sit gave as the necessities of salvation, were a deep consciousness of sin, and a deep sense of the need of a Saviour. He had known a good deal about Mr. Howie's work in the Wynd ; and if they insisted upon shutting up Dr. Dods and refused to let truth be put as he had put it, they struck the ground from any man who wanted to grapple with the sinner. They would subject the inquirer to a process of tuition in theology. The Philippian jailer, then, would never have been saved, for who would say that he knew all that Dr. Dods' opponents demanded as necessary to a Christian. Did even Saul of Tarsus know all they say is necessary for sinners to know before they become Christians ? They had been told that the eyes of the world were on them. Yes, the eyes of the world were on them ; but it was because Dr. Dods had got the ear of the world. Let them take care lest they did anything that would hinder his voice reaching the ear of the world, and reaching it with a message of salvation." The speech made a deep impression on the House.

The antipathy of some of the brethren to the views under discussion was most pronounced. "Pass your

motions," said Mr. Macaskill of Dingwall, "and shield your professors; but let this House in any way degrade the Holy Word of God, and you may bid good-bye as a Free Church to your influence in the Highlands." "If they passed Dr. Adam's motion," said Dr. John M'Ewan of Edinburgh, "then it was an open question and so grave that he for one would feel his relation to the Church fundamentally changed the moment it passed." Yet Mr. Macaskill lived and died an honoured servant of the Church that shielded Dods, and Dr. John M'Ewan is still a respected leader in it.

It must be admitted that the language which Dr. Dods applied to the Bible was a little trying; and perhaps for all that, as it turned out, he meant by it, he might have found milder language. "Errors" and "mistakes" were strong words to make use of for a mere discrepancy like that found in the two narratives of the centurion whose servant Christ healed, St. Matthew informing us that he came himself for Christ, while St. Luke tells us he did not come himself, but sent his servants. Yet this was an example of the "errors," "mistakes," and "inaccuracies" Dr. Dods quoted to the College Committee. His mention of "immoralities" in the Bible was a more dangerous instance of the evil that can be done by the use of unguarded language. When asked to explain his meaning, he said: "I do not mean that Scripture records the immoral actions of persons whose lives are recorded as a part of the history of Israel, for that, of course, was necessary if it was to be a faithful record. But that actions severely reprobated in the New Testament are allowed

or commended or even commanded in the Old. Under this category fall such laws as 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' which our Lord explicitly repeals; the extirpation of tribes conquered in war; the occasional taking of young women into captivity; the permission of bigamy and even of polygamy."[1] Had Dr. Dods described these so-called 'immoralities' as cases of rudimentary morality, the phrase, although clumsier, would have been harmless and quite accurate.

On the other hand, would his purpose have been served had he used mild and soothing language? Could he have roused an apathetic age out of its acquiescence in mechanical theories of God's truth? Was it not well known to him how in Reformation days sturdy champions of God's Word, building their faith

"on the rock that nought can move,"

dared to criticise the Bible with the divine right of men to whom the personal God had vouchsafed a knowledge of Himself? Did not Luther claim the right to correct the trifling discrepancies of Scripture, and even to charge whole books with spuriousness? To him it seemed clear that the Epistle of James was no genuine apostolical Epistle, "was neither written by an apostle nor has it the true apostolic ring, nor does it agree with the pure doctrine," but "was a right *strawy* Epistle, having no true evangelical character." Dr. Dods probably fulfilled the mission which was given him with the only instruments which were ready to his hand. His aim was high and worthy, to restore to men faith and joy in the truths

[1] *College Committee's Report*, p. 31.

of the Divine Word. By too many it had been viewed after the manner of a magical charm; by too few, as the means for bringing to us a knowledge which is life and joy and blessedness.

The controversy, which ended, as we might expect, in a victory for Dr. Adam's motion, was not remarkable for bringing to the front any new ecclesiastic or theologian; but it materially contributed to the reputation of one whose character as a good man and a great ecclesiastic already stood high. The speech of Principal Rainy was sufficient to give the debate historical importance. We close our account of the discussion with two extracts from it. "Suppose a student said to him, 'I take the Word of God as my rule of faith and life. I hear the voice of God everywhere. I find it assuring me on this point and that on what my Father will have me to be and to do; but on the whole, looking to what the Scripture seems to me to claim for itself, and looking to all the facts, I think it is fairer and truer to say that these human incidents of inaccuracy in smaller things that are characteristic just of human history, have not in all cases been averted more than other human incidents or conditions of human writings.' If they asked him to say to that student, 'You are not in a condition to sign the Confession of Faith as a minister of the Free Church,' he would not do it."[1]

"When will it end? it is asked. He thought that a grave question. But suppose one said to him, 'If you allow the questioning of anything, even the smallest and most apparently insignificant in the

[1] *Assembly Proceedings*, p. 114.

Scriptures, if you allow the idea that God has ordered His inspiration of the Scriptures so as in these matters to permit what I am now speaking of, where will you find the limit?' Was it impossible that it should turn out that the Scriptures were so constructed as to lead every honest inquirer to the right decision which they pointed to? Was that impossible? The Bible was a most remarkable book as to its construction, and they were not entitled to assume that God always would give them—though, according to the view that he rested in, He had given them in this respect—that He would always give them mathematical lines. God's way was not always to give them mathematical lines. God had not given them clear mathematical lines about the Canon, and yet they found that they had surmounted that difficulty and that there was no real difficulty about the Canon. God had not given them mathematical lines about the Text; and that was a great matter of difficulty once, and they had surmounted it, and there was no real difficulty about the Text now. God had not given them mathematical lines about Interpretation, and yet honest students of Scripture were agreed about Interpretation — he meant in all the main and essential matters. Then there might be difficulties about Discipline. Perhaps it would be well that they should be taxed with difficulties about Discipline by and by. But he rather thought that the primary object of the Bible was to prove itself a sufficient guide to honest inquirers, and not its primary purpose to enable them with ease to exercise discipline upon dishonest ones."[1]

[1] *Assembly Proceedings*, p. 115.

Turn now to the case of Dr. Bruce, whose name was conjoined with that of Dr. Dods, because the two cases were tried at the same Assembly. Alexander Balmain Bruce's name awoke at the time the most opposite feelings in different men, and even yet continues to do so. There were in the Church those who distrusted Bruce; but there was also a number whose feelings towards him were those of hero-worship. Men who knew not his attractive nature, and whose acquaintance with his teaching extended only to certain garbled extracts from his books, considered him the most dangerous and destructive force that had as yet assaulted the Church from within; but the younger clergy, and all who really knew the man and his work, reputed him to be, with all his faults, the freshest expounder of the gospel in the nineteenth century. At College, Bruce came under two influences that moulded many Scotsmen of the period—Sir William Hamilton and Thomas Carlyle. From the latter he imbibed that hearty contempt for cant, insincerity, and Pharisaism which almost runs riot in his writings, and made them for a time unpalatable with certain classes, but which latterly was often quoted with approval by such as could appreciate honest anger and zeal for righteousness. As a minister he was first settled in the quiet pastorate of Cardross in Dumbartonshire, where he pursued a course of study in the Greek dramatists, and laid the foundations of his first and probably his best known book, *The Training of the Twelve*. What was seen to be remarkable about him at that period, and what was true of him to the last, was his uncommon insight into human character; and

being himself a singularly pure-hearted man as well as a bold thinker, he was led to conceive of God and interpret the divine character from what he knew of the noblest and the best in human nature.

One of a student coterie which met in Bruce's college days at a round table in a house in Edinburgh, where were discussed literary and philosophical questions, tells us that once the subject under discussion was the fate of the heathen, and whether a noble heathen like Socrates could be denied salvation. "Omnipotence can do anything," said one. "Omnipotence can surely do nothing unjust," interposed another. "Omnipotence could not," said a third, "condemn a man of lofty character." "He might do so," said the first speaker, "if He did not approve of his goodness." Bruce, coming forward with clenched fist, closed the debate by an oracular deliverance most characteristic of the man. "I say, Daniel, God *couldn't* damn Socrates"; and, as the narrator of the incident adds, "his scorn for every form of unreality, and his abhorrence of views and practices which were the outcome of worldliness or of a mere passing 'fashion,' moulded all his later as his earlier work."

Dogmatic upon all the surer orthodoxies of the heart, Bruce had learned to have the greatest possible respect for honest intellectual difficulty. His own experience had taught him this. An interesting glimpse of his early struggles in this direction is afforded in a letter written to his friend Macellar of Gourock, a young minister of great gifts, and for a time oppressed with tormenting doubts. "I was in your case for years, diseased at once in body and mind, each acting on

and intensifying the other. If you were a student, I would find no difficulty in knowing what to say; I would say, 'Hae faith and ye'll win through,' 'Let patience have its perfect work.' When I was in your case, I could not have imagined what perfect peace and rest of mind and heart I was to attain to, and have attained to now, by the mercy of God. I do not know the scope and extent of your doubts. I asked your brother-in-law whether they referred to truth itself or to your personal state, and he said the former in order to the latter. With respect to doubts about an interest in Christ, my advice always is, never heed your personal interest, suppose the worst, leave yourself in God's hands. What art thou afraid of—hell? Well, be it so; 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' With respect to doubts on doctrine, it is not so easy to speak, especially in ignorance of what these doubts are. This I will say, I have doubted the whole supernatural system of truth, the incarnation, the atonement, the resurrection of Christ and of men in general, the future world, the inspiration of Scripture, and been indescribably miserable. Now I have attained to the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God and the Father, and of Christ; and so will you. Meantime, get up the tone of your body, and do nothing rashly."[1]

A man with this buoyancy and wonderful life-history behind him could not fail to be a helper of his brother-man, and to leave a profound impression on his age. Bruce enriched our knowledge of Christ and Christianity by many valuable publications. The

[1] *Memorials of a Ministry on the Clyde*, p. xiii.

first of these we have already named. The last was the article "Jesus" in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, which appeared in 1901, two years after the writer's death. That article leaves a fear in the mind of the reader, that Bruce had at last apostatised to the side of naturalism after fighting all his life long in behalf of a supernatural gospel. What gives colour to this apprehension is the summary with which the article opens. It is couched in startling words—; "Jesus Christ, the author and object of the Christian faith, a Jew by race, was born in Palestine towards the end of the reign of Herod the Great. The home of his childhood was Nazareth, a town in the lower division of the province of Galilee. The family to which he belonged was of humble estate. In early youth he worked at a handicraft. On arriving at mature manhood he became a public teacher, rapidly gained fame, gathered about him disciples, offended the ruling classes by free criticism of the prevailing religion, and ended a brief but extraordinary career by suffering crucifixion."[1] As the article proceeds, however, we find our alarms to be groundless, and see that the author had died as he lived—a firm believer and exponent of the supernatural. What statement could be more satisfactory than this—"the healing ministry" (of Jesus), "judged by critical tests, stands on as firm historical ground as the best accredited parts of the teaching"?[2] Or what could form a more luminous and edifying interpretation of Christ's ministry of healing than these words: "These healing acts are a revelation of the love of Jesus, a manifestation of his

[1] *Encycl. Bibl.* col. 2435. [2] *Ibid.* col. 2445.

'enthusiasm for humanity,' to be placed beside the meeting with the publicans of Capernaum as an aid to the understanding of his spirit and aims. By that meeting he showed his interest in a despised class of men; by the healing ministry he showed his interest in a despised part of human nature—the body, and so evinced the healthy catholic nature of his conception of redemption. He was minded to do all the good in the world he could. He was able to heal men's bodies as well as their souls; and he did it, thereby protesting against that pagan notion of the body, as something essentially evil and worthless, which underlies all modes of asceticism; and against a false spiritualism which regards disease of the body as essential to the health of the soul. The healing ministry shows Jesus not as a thaumaturge bent on creating astonishment, but as in a large grand human way the friend of men, bearing by sympathy their sicknesses as well as their sorrows and sins as a burden in his heart."[1]

The work around which controversy raged for a time was *The Kingdom of God; or, Christ's Teaching according to the Synoptical Gospels*, published in 1889. In this volume the author was blamed with giving away some of the things most surely believed among us. The ordinary Calvinistic doctrine of election seemed to be superseded by a theory of the writer's own, which throughout almost all his books he has advocated with repeated and persuasive insistence. It was indeed one of the articles of his creed, one of the good tidings of *his* gospel, which he never

[1] *Encycl. Bibl.* col. 2446.

wearied iterating and reiterating, and which, like his favourite explanation of the atonement, and the paradox element in the parables, the Churches of our land have now received into the sum and substance of their living faith. The offending passages were the following: "How far Jesus was from regarding men, all or any of them, as predestined to damnation, appears from His doctrine of election. He did not think of the elect as chosen to an exclusive salvation, or as enjoying a monopoly of divine favour. He regarded them rather as chosen to the noble vocation and function of saviours to their fellow-men. 'Ye are the salt of the earth'; 'Ye are the light of the world': such was the language He employed to indicate the purpose of their election. The aim is universal human salvation, and the elect of any age are God's agents in the execution of the beneficent plan. If any are unsaved, it is a miscarriage for which God is not responsible, and which wrings from the Redeemer's heart tears of bitter regret. 'I would, ye would not.' It is true, indeed, that from some texts we might gather that even Christ cared only for the elect, and without a pang left all the rest of mankind outside the chosen few to their fate. Thus, in the discourse on the last things, we read, 'He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.' Again, in the same discourse, it is stated that the days of tribulation preceding the second advent shall be shortened 'for the elect's sake.' I do not envy the man who can extract from these texts in an obscure apocalyptic discourse the mean-

ing: What does it matter what happens to the rest of mankind, either in this world or in the next, if only the dear elect are safe? in defiance of the general scope of Christ's teaching, and the broad human sympathies that are the very essence of His gospel. Such men, if they exist, belong to an elect that has lost its savour, and is fit only to be trampled under foot."[1]

Bruce's only defence of these views was, characteristically enough, an emphatic repetition of them. "In this work, as in several other of my writings, I have emphasised the truth that election does not imply a monopoly of Divine favour; that the elect are chosen not only to personal blessing, but to the noble function of being God's agents in blessing the world. I believe this to be an important Bible truth, taught clearly in both Testaments, and with special point and emphasis in Christ's sayings, 'Ye are the salt of the earth'; 'Ye are the light of the world.'"[2]

What proved the principal cause of offence, however, were the critical views contained in the book. The Professor treated these matters in a manner so revolutionary, that memorials and petitions were pressed upon the College Committee from various quarters throughout the country, calling upon it to deal with the case. A memorial from office-bearers in Glasgow charged him with imputing untrustworthiness to the writers of the Synoptist Gospels. He was said to have represented the evangelists as intentionally misplacing many incidents in the life of our Lord with the object

[1] *The Kingdom of God*, p. 322.
[2] *College Committee's Report*, p. 50.

of producing a false impression. Speaking of the evangelist Luke, he had said: "He has taken the scene in the synagogue of Nazareth out of its true historical place and set it in the forefront of his Gospel, to signify that the mission of Jesus concerned men's souls, and that it concerned all men. That scene, as it stands there, stamps Christ's whole ministry with the attributes of spirituality and universality, proclaims it to be throughout a ministry of love to all the sinful, sorrowful sons of men. True, the evangelist's thought is not necessarily the thought of Jesus; and in transferring that scene from its true place, late in the evangelic history, he may be conveying a false impression as to the views and hopes with which the Herald of the kingdom *began* His ministry."[1] Towards the close of the book he said also: "It is conceivable that a direction given by Jesus to His disciples concerning the rite" (baptism) "before His death, say, on the eve of the Passion, at the same time that the Holy Supper was instituted, might have been transferred by the evangelist to what was deemed a specially suitable place in the history—the final leave-taking, there to assume the character of a last instruction by the Master, just before His ascension, to the future apostles."[2]

Luke was also said to have invented narratives as settings for certain of Christ's sayings. Thus, "Suppose the fact were that there was no mission but that of the Twelve, and that the mission of the Seventy is an invention of Luke, or of those to whom he owed his information, the point to be noted is that for this

[1] *The Kingdom of God*, pp. 50–51. [2] *Ibid.* p. 257.

'invented' mission there are no invented *instructions*. The instructions are simply a repetition in substance of those given to the Twelve. If Luke furnished unhistorical settings for some sayings of Jesus, this was the limit of his editorial licence: he reported no sayings which he did not believe to be in substance genuine *logia* of the Master."[1]

Dr. Bruce was further charged with quoting from Strauss with evident approval. "It may be doubted, indeed, whether a real knowledge of the historical Christ be now possible. Strauss writes: 'We know very little about Jesus. The evangelists have daubed his life-image so thick with supernatural colours, that the natural colours can no longer be restored. The Jesus of history is simply a problem, and a problem cannot be the object of faith or the exemplar of life. It is the penalty he pays for having been a God.'"[2] In the second edition of *The Kingdom of God*, Dr. Bruce felt compelled to repudiate the misconstruction put upon this reference to Strauss. "I have been surprised," he said, "to learn that some have understood me to be expressing my own view in the first sentence of the last paragraph, and have even imagined that the quotation following it from Strauss is intended to indicate my own position. I should have imagined that every intelligent person would see that my meaning was, that this sceptical attitude as to the possibility of knowing the historical Christ was a thing apologists had to reckon with. I cite Strauss as an illustrative instance, as in an earlier part of this chapter I cite Huxley."[3]

[1] *The Kingdom of God*, p. 27.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 359.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 357.

The Memorialists, in their endeavour to bring home Dr. Bruce's errors, argued that such liberties as he had imputed to the evangelists were incompatible with honest biography, not to say inspiration. It was intolerable to them that Dr. Bruce's suppositions about the evangelists adapting, altering, and toning down their material to meet the needs of the time, should be suffered to pass unchallenged and uncondemned. Was a professor of the Church to be tolerated who taught that "it is not at all unlikely that a certain number of the existing variations are due to the evangelists themselves"; that these men "so far exercised their discretion in the use of their sources, as to make the material serviceable to the edification of those for whose special benefit they wrote—acting not in a spirit of licence, but with the freedom of men who believed that it was more important that their readers should get a true impression of Christ, than that they should know the *ipsissima verba* of His sayings. Thus may be accounted for alterations of words and phrases occurring in the documents, and omissions of material found there, not deemed suitable for his purpose by the compiler"?[1] Was it permissible to speak of our Lord, as Dr. Bruce did in his volume, as investing the hard prosaic fact of His death with poetic, mystic, spiritual meanings; as a genius able to cope with death and rob it of its sting and repulsiveness; as "divining His fate from the treatment experienced by the prophets"; and as arriving by a process of reasoning at the conviction that He must rise from the dead? "Was there anything in the Gospel records," asked

[1] *The Kingdom of God*, p. 7.

one of Bruce's prosecutors, "to countenance such a view, so unworthy of, so dishonouring to, our Divine Saviour? Was He a mere calculator? Was this Christ of Dr. Bruce the Christ of the Gospels, the Christ they had been taught to revere and to trust?" "He," said another, "had been keeping company with a certain school of German critics,—not the most reputable school,—so that he had come to see matters very much from the standpoint of these critics. His work was full of references to Kuenen, Ritschl, *et hoc genus omne*."[1]

The Kingdom of God contained yet other causes of offence. The author had brought down a heavy hand on the very classes that rose in arms against him, after the manner of Burns' assaults on the "unco guid." "To be religious without love," he had written, "was to be at the farthest possible distance from God and true righteousness."[2] "I am even disposed to think that a great and steadily increasing portion of the moral worth of society lies outside the Church, separated from it not by godlessness, but rather by exceptionally intense moral earnestness. Many, in fact, have left the Church in order to be Christians."[3] Christ has taught us to "look for the most aggravated types of moral degeneracy from the divine ideal of manhood, not among the irreligious, but among the inhumanly religious."[4] "At times the spiritual Salem has resembled certain terrestrial cities known to us as they appear in the time of frost, enveloped in a grimy

[1] *Assembly Proceedings*, pp. 156, 157.
[2] *The Kingdom of God*, p. 141.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 144.
[4] *Ibid.* p. 146.

fog which shuts out the sun and blue sky visible in the surrounding country. At such unhappy periods the question suggests itself, Is the Church of any use: were it not well that it perished, that Christianity might the better thrive? Then, instead of claiming for the Church that within it alone is salvation to be found, earnest men are more inclined to ask whether salvation is to be found in it at all, and does not rather consist in escaping from its influence. A good many are asking such revolutionary questions even now; and it is foolish for Churchmen simply to be shocked, and to characterise them as profane. The Church is only a means to an end. It is good only in so far as it is Christian. There is no merit or profit in mere ecclesiasticism. Whatever reveals the true Christ is of value and will live. Whatever hides Christ, be it pope, priest, or presbyter, sacraments or ecclesiastical misrule, is pernicious and must pass away. But we may hope that there will always be enough of Christ's spirit in the society which bears His name to keep it from becoming utterly savourless, and to bring about such reforms as may be necessary to make it serve the end for which it was instituted. Should this hope be disappointed, then the visible Church, as we know it, must and will pass away, leaving the spirit of Christ free room to make a new experiment, under happier auspices, at self-realisation. To be enthusiastic about the Church in its present condition is impossible, to hope for its future is not impossible; but if it were, there is no cause for despair. Christ will ever remain the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever: and the kingdom of God will remain a kingdom that cannot

be moved."[1] Such plain speaking aggravated Dr. Bruce's guilt in the opinion of his enemies. In addition to being a dangerous and irreverent heretic, he was branded as a treacherous and disloyal servant of the Church.

Dr. Bruce explained his critical attitude in the offending volume in a manner that satisfied the Church as a whole. He implored his prosecutors to consider that attitude in the light of the aim set forth in the volume. The question there discussed was how far the Synoptist writers Matthew and Luke may be regarded as putting us in possession of Christ's teaching in its original form, and the problem he had set before him to solve was that of accounting for Luke's omissions otherwise than through ignorance. Can we or can we not ascertain with substantial accuracy the words of our Lord as He may have originally spoken them? To this important and difficult question, different men have, of course, given different answers. Mr. Huxley has answered the question in a negative. We cannot be sure that we know almost anything respecting Christ's teaching. Dr. Bruce, on the other hand, in the sequel of the introductory chapter of his book, gave an affirmative reply to the question; and endeavoured to show that we can with substantial accuracy, although with varying degrees of literal exactness, learn from the Synoptists what Christ's teaching originally amounted to. He showed that of the two, Matthew came nearest to the primitive form of the Master's sayings; whereas Luke receded from it to a certain limited and ascer-

[1] *The Kingdom of God*, p. 271.

tainable extent, from motives in every way worthy of him as a canonical writer and an inspired evangelist. Such was the situation discussed in the volume which had given rise to so much panic. In reality, Dr. Bruce, as became a professor of Apologetics, was defending instead of, as was alleged, attacking the faith. It might be that certain expressions applied to the evangelists were most liable to be misunderstood, as, for example, the phrase "perfectly trustworthy." In regard to that phrase, he explained that it referred to the reliableness of the sources viewed objectively, and not to the good faith of the writers, which he had not the remotest intention of calling in question. As regards his representation of the evangelists suiting their reports of Christ's words to the practical needs of their readers, there was nothing offensive in such a supposition. On the contrary, was it not the duty of the strong to have regard to the infirmity of the young and weak in the faith? and if the evangelist Luke acted on this principle, in the omissions and modifications peculiar to his Gospel, was he not simply following the Master's own example when He told the disciples that He had yet many things to say to them, but they could not bear them then?

At the discussion of the Professor's book in the Assembly of 1890, two of the leaders of the Church supported the finding of the College Committee, which was to the effect that while there was much to regret in it, there was really no case for a heresy charge. Dr. Ross Taylor reminded the House that Dr. Bruce was not to be held responsible for the questions discussed by him in his volume: he had not raised them for the

first time: they existed independently of him: and had been often used by infidel and rationalistic writers so as to weaken men's faith and loyalty to the truth. Dr. Bruce, as an accredited guide and teacher in the Church, had refused to shut his eyes to these dangers that threatened the common faith, and had valiantly striven to meet them. As an explorer in critical fields of inquiry, he had come back with his faith unshaken and even confirmed in the verities of divine truth. Should such a man have his mouth closed on these questions at the invitation of panic-stricken alarmists, or content himself with empty sneers and jeers at German rationalism? Did the Church admire that type of professor? Had not the time come to face boldly and frankly the questions which were agitating them all? He looked upon it as a great thing that in their Free Church of Scotland they had men who were determined to take these questions in hand with a strong grasp, and to let the public know what was true and worthy, and what was to be rejected as mere speculation and guesswork. The speech tended greatly to the pacification of the Church.

Principal Rainy still further succeeded in allaying the feeling of alarm. Dr. Bruce, he argued, was dealing with the vexed question of the variations that existed independently of any of them in the Gospels. He was dealing with these variations quite legitimately along the lines of a certain hypothesis. On the highest possible view of inspiration, a variation in the report which God was pleased to sanction in the Gospel might conceivably be a variation in the report which the evangelist Luke might produce as

the agent of God in composing the Gospel. Dr. Bruce must carry on the teaching to which they had appointed him, in his classes and his books, from his own and not from their convictions. Every honourable man in such a position as he was must do that, and he was certain that, while, like all professors, he would continue to maintain his own convictions,—the primary duty of an honest man,—he would desire to have such tender regard as an honest man might have to the convictions and susceptibilities of the Church of God. Dr. Rainy's speech was a noble plea for toleration, and, as has been said, did much to allay the suspicion and fears which prevailed in the bosom of many good men.

But, to the surprise of all and to the special delight of his friends, the speech of Dr. Bruce himself exercised the most restoring and quieting influence of any. In a winning and genial manner, he began by reminding the Assembly that his book dealt with a comparatively new department of theology. As a pioneer work, therefore, it might surely claim the indulgence due to those who trod unfrequented paths. The aim of the book was to expound Christ's teaching as recorded in the first three Gospels. The attempt involved apologetic as well as exegetical handling, inasmuch as in certain so-called free-thought circles the Gospels were not deemed reliable sources of the teaching of Christ. This was the situation in view when he wrote the book ; and his aim was to vindicate the general reliableness of the Gospel records of Christ's words, and to do so by processes of reasoning which might be regarded as valid by the advocates of

sceptical opinions. "I appeal to all intelligent and candid readers to say whether I have not addressed myself to the difficult and delicate task in a loyal spirit, and whether the general effect of what I have written is not conservative on the whole. I by no means claim to have written a book which is not open to criticism. I am sure of my intention to do a service to the faith. I am not so confident of the success of my performance; and in so far as by infelicity in expression, or by inadvertence, or by preoccupation with outside and unbelieving opinion, I have so written as to give rise to misunderstanding, I have no hesitation in expressing in the frankest manner my sincere regret."[1]

On the general subject of inspiration, he expressed cordial respect for the jealousy of their Church, and proceeded to say that the comparative study of the religions of the world had deepened his conviction that the Bible was an exceptional, a divine book. "Whether we compare the accounts of the origin of things in Genesis with those found elsewhere, or the psalms with the Vedic or Accadian hymns, or the prophets with the highest utterances of poets and sages, or the Gospels with the so-called *Teaching of the twelve Apostles*, or the Epistles with the ethical doctrine of pagan moralists, the impression ever is—This is a Book by itself, the marvellous literature of a very real revelation which God has made to mankind through the Hebrew race. Whatever differences there may be amongst us as to the exact theological definition of inspiration, or the inferences to be drawn therefrom, or

[1] *Assembly Proceedings*, p. 174.

the wisdom and validity of *a priori* inferences on such a subject, a point on which past experience in the history of theology is full of warning, however we may differ on these matters, we are at one on the main question. I venture to think that on this subject, or indeed on any subject, we are not so far apart as in the heat of debate we may seem."[1]

"My youth," he went on, turning autobiographical, "was cast in a time of ecclesiastical controversy. I went to College in 1845, less than fifteen years old. It is not good for youth to know too soon the evil that is in the world, even though it be necessary evil. I made my escape from the strife of the Churches to the teaching of Jesus, where I saw in its brightness and unearthly beauty the Christian ideal. But the ideal casts a deep shadow on all reality,—on one's own character, on the religious life of the community, on the course of ecclesiastical history. It is the shadow of the ideal that rests on those passages in my books in which I speak of the Church. I am not greatly concerned to defend all I have said. I am content that you should apply to these passages all the epithets that hostile criticism can think of. Call them one-sided, severe, pessimistic; all true, possibly, and more. But that is only one side. The other is, I have been looking at the Church in the dazzling light of the King and the Kingdom.

"In the closing passage of its special report the College Committee recognise the 'intellectual vigour' of my book. I thank them for the compliment. But I must take leave to say that it is a small thing to me in

[1] *Assembly Proceedings*, p. 175.

connection with such a work to be complimented on my ability. The question is, Have I seen Christ and helped others to see Him? I would rather be one of the 'babes' to whom the things of the Kingdom were revealed, than one of the 'wise and prudent' from whom they were hid. I would rather be one of the 'unlearned and ignorant' men who through companionship with Jesus had become imbued with His spirit, than one of the Sanhedrin who with all their learning could see in Jesus and His companions only a band of bold, lawless, dangerous men to be got rid of as soon as possible. I have been trying all my life to see Jesus and to show Him; and if I have failed, it will be small consolation to be told that I have written with considerable ability."[1]

"In the *Review of Reviews* for February is a catalogue of the best hundred books for a minister's library, as compiled by the theological professors of Princeton Seminary. Dr. C. W. Hodge supplies the list in New Testament exegesis, and in it stands this entry—'Bruce's *Kingdom of God*.' When I consider what a bad book this has been thought to be by some who have read it and by many more who have not read it in this Church; and when I mark the tremulous caution with which our worthy College Committee has put forth its hand to touch it, I can hardly help thinking, either that there has been some printer's mistake in the *Review of Reviews*, or that the Dr. Hodge who made that entry is not a genuine orthodox Hodge, but one of those heterodox professors of the Dods and Bruce type who by some mischance find their way occasionally into

[1] *Assembly Proceedings*, p. 176.

orthodox Colleges. If, on the other hand, Dr. Hodge is to be regarded, as no doubt he is, as a thoroughly orthodox theologian, then the conclusion I come to is that my loyalty to the faith which the motion of Mr. Balfour declares should be made manifest to the world, is fully as manifest to the orthodox world of America as it is to this Free Assembly.

"In conclusion, Moderator, I need not say that the controversy that has arisen has given me pain chiefly, I may say almost exclusively, because of misunderstandings which have arisen in the minds of men whom I love as my brethren. The personal bearing of this controversy has never cost me a thought. I am thankful to say that I have been sustained in the utmost buoyancy of spirit all through; but it has been a grief to me to be misunderstood by good men. I trust, however, that the painful feeling on all sides will soon pass away, and that I shall be able in the evening of my days to look back on the unpleasant incidents of the present year, partly as the needful discipline of my infirmities, but partly also as the honourable *marks of the Lord Jesus*."[1]

The day that heard this noble *Apologia*, was the last day for criticism to be dreaded as a foe that intended a destructive assault on the Truth. The Churches in Scotland have allowed their sacred documents to be subjected to critical investigation, not with the uneasy trembling of former days, but under the conviction that they must be submitted to the same searching tests that are applied to other historical records. Faith in the Bible as the Word of God welcomes every fair and

[1] *Assembly Proceedings*, p. 176.

reasonable inquiry into the character and credibility of the records. And the Churches are now more and more prepared to "believe in the Bible not in spite of criticism, but because of it ; not under protest against it, but by reason of it ; not although criticism has shown that certain views of inspiration are untenable, but just because this has been the case."[1]

[1] *Contentio Veritatis*, p. 208.

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